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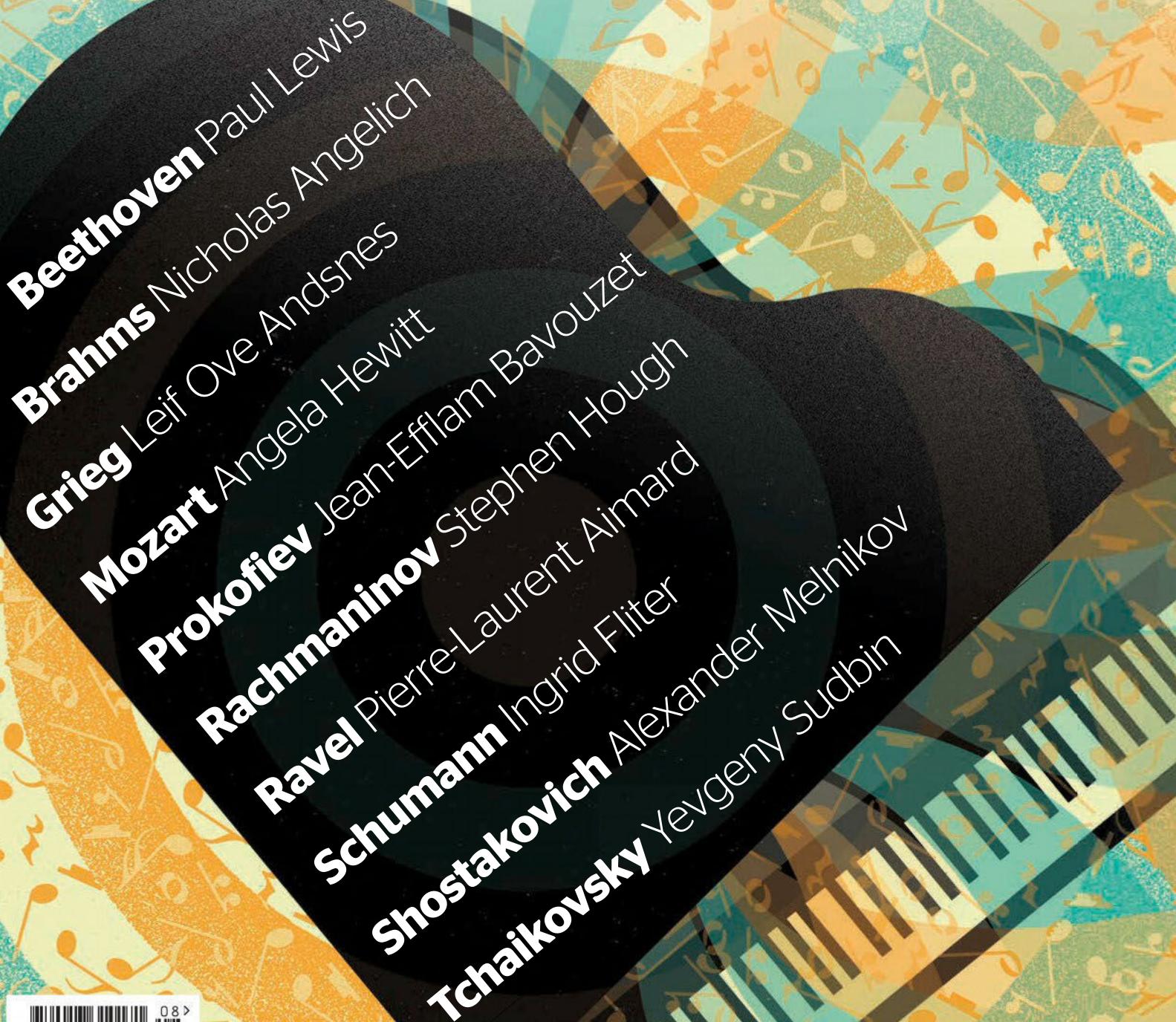
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Sonya Yoncheva, who makes her debut as Norma, and Ryoichi Hirano, Principal Dancer with The Royal Ballet.
Photograph: Mariano Vivanco (©ROH, 2016)



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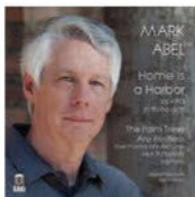
SOUNDS OF AMERICA

A special eight-page section focusing on recent recordings from the US and Canada

M Abel

Home is a Harbor^a. The Palm Trees are Restless^b

^aJamie Chamberlin, ^aAriel Pistorino, ^bHila Plitmann sop, ^aJanelle DeStefano mez, ^aJon Lee Keenan ten, ^aBabatunde Akinboboye, ^aE Scott Levin bars, ^aCarver Cossey bass, ^bTali Tadmor pf, ^aLa Brea Sinfonietta / Benjamin Makino Delos ® ② DE3495 (124' • DDD • S/T)



The two works receiving their premiere recordings on this disc show the American composer Mark Abel to have an affinity for vocal settings in diverse contexts. *Home is a Harbor* is his first opera, while *The Palm Trees are Restless* gives striking musical life to five poems by Kate Gale.

In both pieces, Abel employs a colourful blend of styles, ranging from classical and jazz to hints of rock. They serve the emotional nature of each score to bracing and poignant effect. The opera traces the odyssey of twin sisters in California who set out as idealists and learn the challenging ways of the world. The moral is a 21st-century variation on 'there's no place like home'.

All of the characters in *Home is a Harbor* have first names beginning with the letter L, for reasons unknown. But they're certainly connected by the circumstances that bring them together, pull them apart and, at the end, bind them. Abel's lucid narrative and vibrant vocal lines, combined with telling orchestrations for a chamber ensemble, make the work an affecting experience. The cast is strong, and Benjamin Makino conducts La Brea Sinfonietta in a vivid performance.

Unlike the opera, the song-cycle eschews idealism for hard realities of life. The verses are bursts of feeling that Abel sets to vocal lines of strenuous extremes. The brilliant soprano Hila Plitmann manages every leap and switch of emotional gears with fearless commitment, and pianist Tali Tadmor matches her in power and subtlety.

Donald Rosenberg

PHOTOGRAPHY: TATIANA DAUBER

GRAMOPHONE talks to...

Dashon Burton

The award-winning baritone from the Bronx on his new album, 'Songs of Struggle & Redemption'



Tell us how the idea for this album first came about.

My producer and I were comparing notes about future projects, and these beautiful songs spoke to both of us; we both knew we had to add to the already legendary body of work by others with our own efforts.

How did you choose which of these songs to include?

These are my favorites ever since I began singing! Some of them were recent additions, and Nat [pianist Nathaniel Gumbs] and I were glad to experiment a bit on some of them.

When do you remember first becoming aware of these songs?

When I was young, these songs were so powerful, and though I didn't know much about music at the time, they really shot to the heart. Such amazing melodies and strong words, imbued with so much faith and spirit. I knew they were different, even if I couldn't say how.

Do you feel you need to find a special way to approach this sort of music?

I believe that these songs are absolutely accessible to anyone with an open heart and an open mind. They don't belong to any one vocal style.

What's coming up next?

I'm hoping to put together a compendium of some of the 'bad boys' of the Baroque era. There are some amazingly fun and virtuoso pieces out there that I can't wait to tackle! To keep up, you can also follow me on Twitter (@dashonburton) - where you can find my sense of duty to the music I love, next to the sense of humour that I've worked so hard to cultivate!

Schumann

'Fantasy & Romance'

Fantasiestücke, Op 73. Adagio and Allegro, Op 70. Drei Romanzen, Op 94. Märchenbilder, Op 113. Fünf Stücke im Volkston, Op 102.

Abendlied, Op 85 No 12. Traümerie, Op 15 No 7

Emanuel Gruber vc **Keiko Sekino** pf

Delos ® DE3481 (70' • DDD)



You can hardly blame musicians for being eager to play Schumann chamber

pieces not written for their instruments. Who wouldn't want to visit, however briefly, the world of 'Fantasy & Romance' that cellist Emanuel Gruber and pianist Keiko Sekino inhabit on their new disc? Schumann wrote only one of the works, *Five Pieces in Folk-style*, Op 102, with the cello expressly in mind. But since all of the repertoire conjures up poetic and ardent images, the cello is literally typecast in this music.

Clarinetists might feel the *Fantasiestücke*, Op 73, sound more idiomatic on their instrument; the same for hornists and the *Adagio and Allegro*,

PULITZER PRIZE WINNING COMPOSER

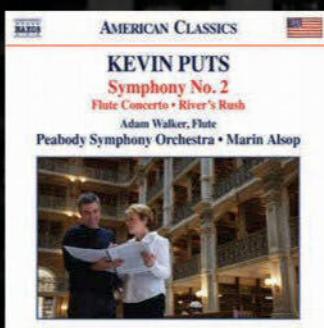
KEVIN PUTS

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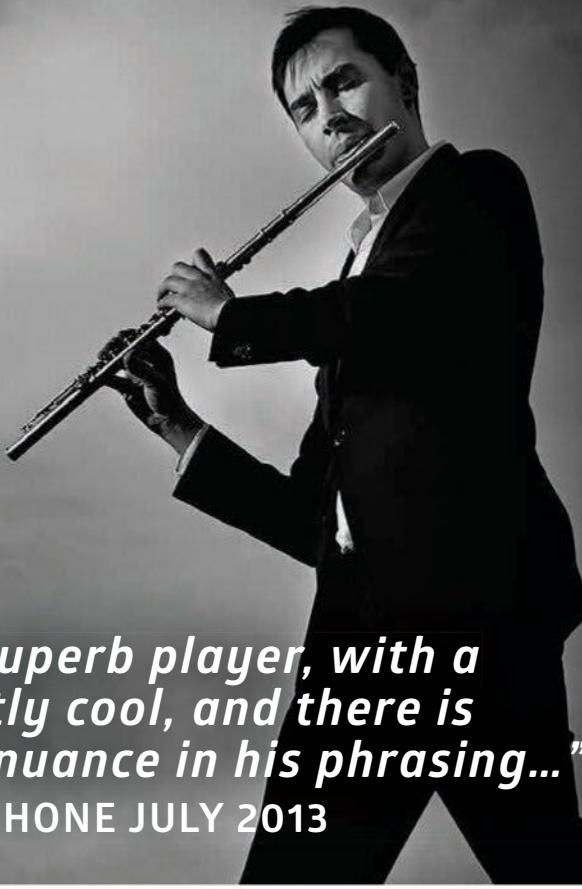
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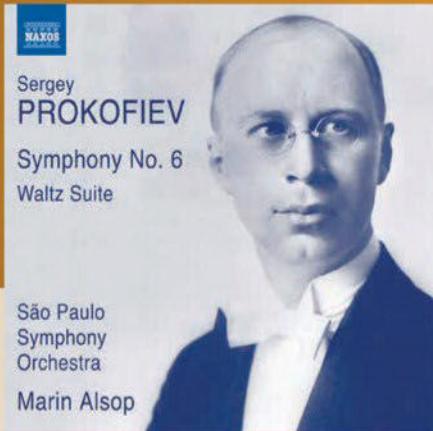
He (Walker) is a superb player, with a tone that is slightly cool, and there is much delicacy of nuance in his phrasing...

- GRAMOPHONE JULY 2013

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Few conductors of her generation have made more recordings, and more highly acclaimed ones, than she.

- BOSTON GLOBE

PHOTO: ADRIANE WHITE



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Emanuel Gruber and Keiko Sekino present works by Schumann on Delos

Op 70, and viola players and the *Fairy-tale Pictures*, Op 113. Yet taken on their own terms, these creations have their fervent say and sweep the listener along as shaded by the cello's contemplative personality.

In Gruber's mellow hands, everything else on the disc emerges as a deeply considered essay, often with touches of wise humour and even world-weariness. When Schumann is at his most rustic, as in the Op 102 folk pieces, Gruber heightens the weighty nature of the tunes. The collection's beloved 'Langsam' is both tender and regretful, as only the cello can render it.

Sekino is a discerning partner throughout the programme. She gives no hint that she objects to conceding to the cello the thematic material in Lothar Lechner's transcriptions of two piano pieces – 'Abendlied' from Op 85 and the sublime 'Träumerei' from *Kinderszenen*. No wonder: Gruber treats it all with loving care.

Donald Rosenberg

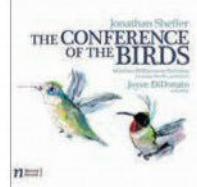
Sheffer

The Conference of the Birds

(versions with and without narration)

Joyce DiDonato narr Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra / Jonathan Sheffer

Navona Ⓜ NV6037 (52' • DDD)



Jonathan Sheffer brings many of his estimable skills as composer and

conductor to the table in *The Conference of the Birds*, an enchanting orchestral work based on a 12th-century epic poem by Farid ud-Din Attar, a Persian Sufi. As led by the composer, the premiere recording features two versions of the piece – one with narration featuring mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato almost giddily reciting Sheffer's text and lending distinctive voice to all sorts of avian characters.

The Cabrillo Festival of Contemporary Music commissioned the piece in 2014 for a family concert, and it should have a healthy life in the concert hall. The work, about birds seeking a leader in an uneasy world, has roots in several other scores in the genre, including Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*, as well as nods to Stravinsky and Britten. But Sheffer's discerning instincts for atmosphere and colour give the score its own glistening and touching identity.

With his extensive experience as a film composer, Sheffer here demonstrates the importance of pacing, mood and gesture.

Every detail serves to advance and heighten the narrative in the most concise terms. The piece should appeal equally to listeners young and old.

As much fun as it is to hear DiDonato go to town as narrator, the orchestral version is an opportunity to savour the delightful squawks, chirps and other bird effects that Sheffer weaves so deftly into his nuanced sonic fabric. He conducts the Moravian Philharmonic Orchestra in a performance vibrant in detail and soaring when the birds take wing. **Donald Rosenberg**

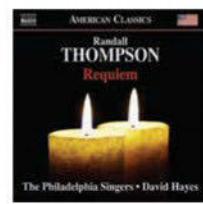
Thompson

Requiem

The Philadelphia Singers / David Hayes

Naxos American Classics Ⓜ 8 559789

(55' • DDD • T)



In a parallel universe, Randall Thompson's Requiem – touched by the deaths of a young choral director who was 'incredibly passionate about the choral art' and of a personal friend – might have become a standard work. Thompson was already a dean of American choral composers, and the Requiem was his personal statement on

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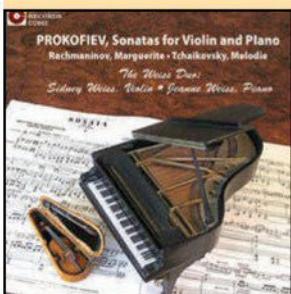
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Cynthia DeAlmeida, "principal oboe of the Pittsburgh Symphony, is a poetic artist who teams beautifully with superb orchestra colleagues, [including] Noah Bendix-Balgley, now concertmaster of the Berlin Philharmonic... The old and new composers they perform so expressively" (Gramophone) include Reinecki, Arnold, Wunderer, and Moricz. *"One of the best oboe players in the world"* (Amer. Rcd. Guide) CD825.

"Béla Bartók composed 44 duos for violins. His son, Peter, arranged 23 of them for viola and cello. These little masterpieces...receive thoughtful and buoyant performances...Read Thomas' *Dream Catcher* [solo viola] is a burst of expressive ideas...Del Tredici's *Cello Acrostic* conveys an aura of fantasy [and] songfulness. Piston's Duo is poised and lyrical." (Gramophone) CD880.



"An unexpected stroke of good luck, Crystal has issued a Russian programme played by violinist Sidney Weiss and his wife Jeanne, taken from a 1968 live concert" He puts "to full use the commanding, soaring precision and full-blooded style that made him one of the country's most valued concertmasters [Chicago Symphony, Los Angeles Philharmonic]." (Gramophone) CD882.



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The Way Things Go

Tara Helen O'Connor, flute
 Maragaret Kampmeier, piano



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"Fluidity and responsiveness run through the entire disc and complement the crystalline purity of O'Connor's tone and the rhythmic incisiveness of Kampmeier's playing."

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The Philadelphia Singers: 'not only technically superb but exceptionally warm and passionate' in Randall Thompson's Requiem

life and death. It is beautifully written for the chorus, occasionally quite thrilling, with lovely lyrical touches along the way, but it is a shade more anonymous than such large-scale self expressions need to be.

Perhaps that explains why, although the Requiem was premiered in May 1958 at the University of California, Berkeley, which had commissioned it, and then presented again in 1959 at Harvard, it took until 2014 for the first complete recording to be made.

Thompson set his music to 18 Biblical verses in the form of a nominally dramatic dialogue between choruses of mourners and faithful; and though there are several sections that require each choir to divide again, to a maximum of 16 parts, the music largely flows gracefully along muted emotional parameters, suggestive of the Italian Renaissance madrigal cycles Thompson said were his inspiration.

After waiting more than half a century, this first recording, by the 32-voice Philadelphia Singers conducted by David Hayes, is not only technically superb but exceptionally warm and passionate; the singers, who are now Resident Chorus of the Philadelphia Orchestra, know both the music and the words, and claim to have given the first-ever live performances of the Requiem by a professional chorus.

Laurence Vittes

'American Webster'

Brandt Round Top Trio Larsen Barn Dances
Schoenfeld Sonatina Sirota Birds of Paradise
Toensing Children of Light
The Webster Trio

Crystal Records Ⓜ CD717 (67' • DDD)



The Webster Trio's premiere recordings of music by five American composers show that the rare combination of flute, clarinet and piano has considerable range and depth, in addition to its obvious mellifluous charms.

The most ambitious work is Richard Toensing's *Children of Light*, a spiritual journey written for The Websters, set in five movements of differing mood and pace, drawing on the theology, language and music of the Orthodox Church, whose final vision is a radiant, impressionist haze. Robert Sirota's *Birds of Paradise* celebrated the 20th anniversary of flautist Leone Buyse and clarinetist Michael Webster's marriage, quoting Shelley's 'profuse strains of unpremeditated art' and commenting that 'every culture has its images of paradise, all of which include the sights and sounds of birds' – in Sirota's case those of Singapore and coastal Maine. It is turns contemplative and excitable, and engages in

moments of explicit, intertwined love and beauty before ending on quieter notes.

The Websters provide lighter fare in the form of Libby Larsen's gently rousing set of four *Barn Dances*, including a homage to cowboy star Gene Autry; Anthony Brandt's brilliantly suspenseful *Round Top Trio*; and Paul Schoenfeld's Sonatina, a magnificent *tour de morph* of three popular dances, the last a delirious Jig.

The trio, in residence at the Shepherd School of Music at Rice University in Houston, play to their credentials: Buyse was principal in Boston and Webster principal in San Francisco, while Shepherd colleague pianist Robert Moeling adds exceptional sensitivity and poetry to his virtuosity. **Laurence Vittes**

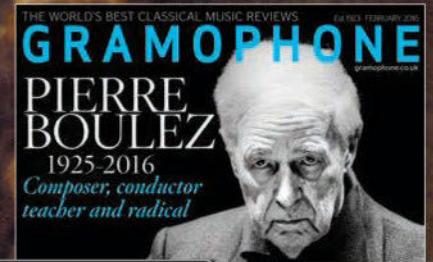
'Songs of Struggle & Redemption'

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child.
 My Lord, what a mornin'. Go down, Moses.
 Wade in de water. Nobody knows de trouble
 I've seen. I want to be ready. Joshua fit de battle
 of Jericho. Steal away. Deep river. Go tell it on
 de mountains!. Give me Jesus. Ride on, King
 Jesus!. I've been in de storm. Were you there.
 He never said a mumberlin' word. Don't you
 weep after me. Keep your eyes on the prize.
 We shall not be moved. This train. If you miss
 me from the back of the bus. Freedom in the air.
 We shall overcome

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Flautist Tara Helen O'Connor and pianist Margaret Kampmeier

Dashon Burton bass-bar **Nathaniel Gumbs** pf
Acis Productions © APL30868 (61' • DDD • T)



Bass-baritone Dashon Burton has begun to develop a flourishing career with orchestras and opera companies. Here, he shows the intimate side of his artistry in a recital entitled 'Songs of Struggle & Redemption: We Shall Overcome'. Intimate doesn't necessarily mean small. Burton, in fact, has a voluminous voice, rich in timbre and flexible throughout the range. But he doesn't seem at all interested in overselling. The range of emotions he conveys reflects thorough and thoughtful examination of texts and music.

It would be all too easy for Burton to emphasise the overt passions in these songs of hardship and protest. He can send his voice resounding into space when required, as in the opening phrase of 'Ride on, King Jesus!'. A moment later, he drops to a hush, heightening the poignancy of the words. The same attention to mood makes his account of 'Deep river', with its long, languid lines, a prayer of touching beauty.

In an extraordinary *a cappella* performance of 'He never said a numberlin' word', Burton demonstrates

a formidable gift for storytelling as he becomes softer and softer as the song moves to its painful end. In 'We shall overcome,' which became closely associated with the civil rights movement, he focuses sensitive attention on the fervent messages, shaping the proud statements in an ebb and flow of intense feeling.

Burton treats the repertoire with art-song fastidiousness. He has the good fortune to collaborate with the like-minded Nathaniel Gumbs, a pianist of precise, refined artistry. **Donald Rosenberg**

'The Way Things Go'

Festinger *The Way Things Go* **Halle Gaze**
Kaminsky Duo *Mackey Crystal Shadows* **Moe All Sensation is Already Memory** **B Reynolds** *Share*
Woolf *Righteous Babe*
Tara Helen O'Connor f/s **Margaret Kampmeier** pf
Bridge © BRIDGE9467 (74' • DDD)



What is most striking about Tara Helen O'Connor's affectionate assemblage of music for flute and piano, written with one exception after the turn of the new century, is how close the flute and piano parts work to establish character, carry the narrative and share the most brilliant parts. Five of the seven

works were composed for her and pianist Margaret Kampmeier, and they inhabit the music as if the interactive nature of their musical partnership were their paramount concern and pleasure. Among the seven, which all seem eager to make very pleasant sounds at the very least, Steven Mackey's *Crystal Shadows*, John Halle's *Gaze* and Belinda Reynolds's *Share* stand out, while Eric Moe's *All Sensation is Already Memory* deserves a nod for its fluent virtuosity.

Mackey's duet uses effects like slap-key notes on the flute and stopped tones on the piano as plot devices in a series of fragmented, race-course turns in which the flute and piano chase each other at times like squirrels; Mackey wrote it to play with his wife, and the close intimacy of its inspiration shows in the opportunities it gives O'Connor and Kampmeier to blend and shade their emotional states.

The star of Halle's *Gaze* is an inebriated 'Rag: Raucous', which uses Beethovenian chunks of sound to introduce a goofy dance; the 'Slow tango/Habanera' second movement gives both players equal kinds of intense emotional displays. Modelled after Stravinsky's *Les cinq doigts*, Reynolds's *Share* for alto flute displays O'Connor's ability to create impossibly long, slow phrases across many bar-lines.

Laurence Vittes

prime phonic

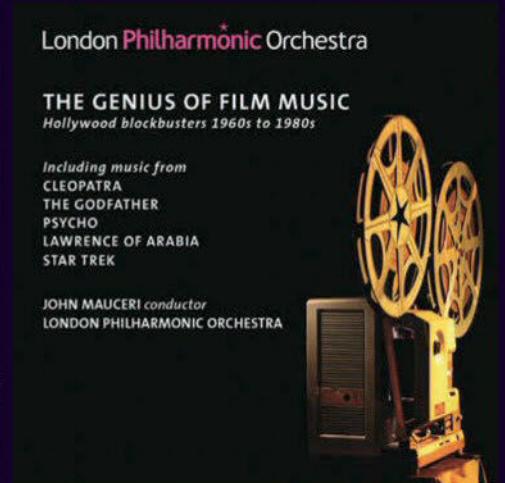
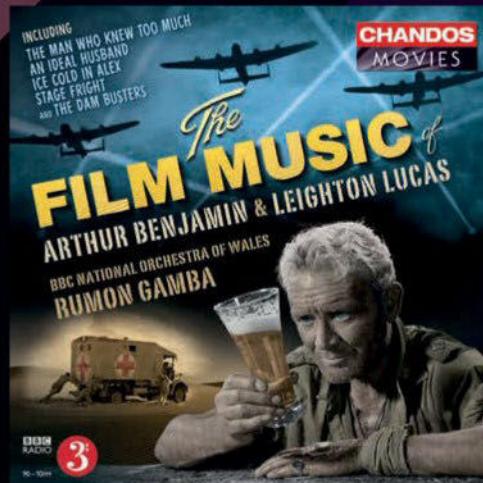
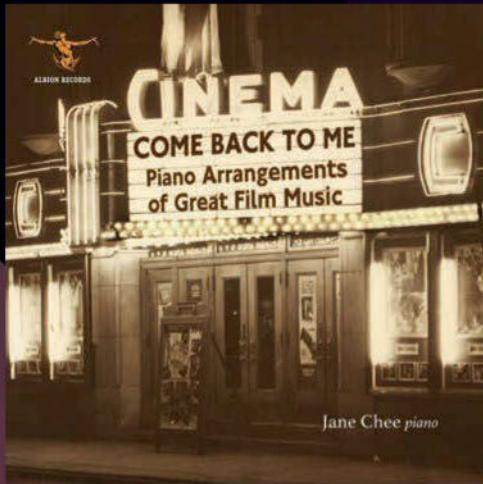
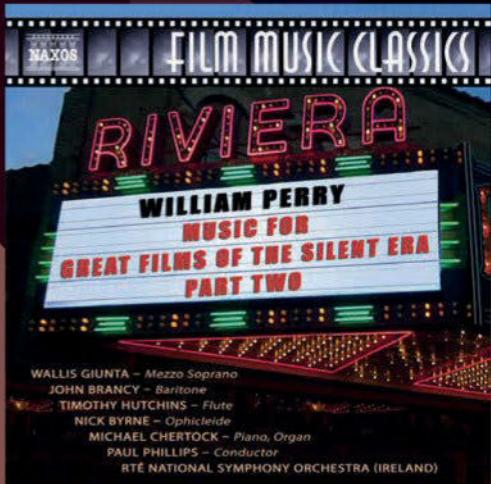
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The fun to be found in making musical lists

While I write this, the votes from our panel of reviewers are being collated as we conclude the penultimate stage of our Awards process. To recap: our critics have already reduced our initial list of many hundreds of contenders to a shortlist of six per category, and then they've listened again to those, sending in their nominations. We'll very shortly know the winner of each category, and then the final stage will see a smaller panel gather later this month to choose the Recording of the Year.

I can't, obviously, reveal anything at this stage – but it's been a strong year of releases from major and indie labels alike, in both core repertoire and more exploratory projects, and the results will reflect that.

Why I am writing all this now? Well, partly to whet appetites, but I also wanted to reflect a little on the wider issue of Awards, of 'best of category' initiatives, and of lists in general. It's something we at *Gramophone* do a lot: as well as our Awards, there is also our Hall of Fame, our playlists, and the recommended recording lists we run online, most recently focusing on Gluck and Beethoven. We know that these are among our most-read web features, and giving readers something they enjoy is one of the most gratifying aspects of publishing.

But I also hope it contributes something to everyone's understanding of recording. Some readers have written to me to question this sort of article (and, let me say, I really do appreciate all correspondence – supportive or otherwise). Are people really interested in lists? Do they over-simplify the complex nature



of critical judgement? The answer I give is that such features can work in many ways, for all types of readers.

For the most committed collector, they can be a useful shortcut into the decades-long legacy of our critics' opinions: each choice is backed up by a strongly favourable review. I'd also challenge any *Gramophone* reader not to have, in their minds, a series of lists of their favourite interpretations or interpreters. We should always challenge any views we hold, if only to have them reinforced after thorough scrutiny. And, if the *Gramophone* office is anything to go by, discussing such lists is also fun!

None of us are all-knowing experts – I'm certainly not. We all have differing degrees of knowledge, and we all need guidance. That's why *Gramophone* seeks out and invites the finest critics to share their knowledge in their specialist areas. For the discoverer – of new recordings, new repertoire, even core repertoire – such lists can open doors to life-enriching experiences. So I hope you'll take time to explore and enjoy our lists – online, and in the magazine. Which brings me to this month's cover story, in which we invited 10 of today's leading pianists to each discuss one of 10 great piano concertos. The list was our choice, and is necessarily subjective. The list of artists, however, was easier – each is an extraordinary exponent of the pianist's art, and has contributed a remarkable recording of the relevant work to the catalogue. We're hugely grateful for the time they've given to help us with what's turned out to be a fascinating feature.

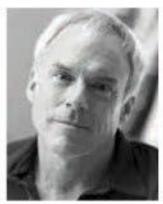
martin.cullingford@markallengroup.com

THIS MONTH'S CONTRIBUTORS



'Piano concertos have been an integral part of my musical experience for as long as I can remember,' says

MICHAEL MCMANUS, responsible for compiling this issue's cover story. 'How fascinating – and what a privilege – to explore 10 of the greatest of them, from the inside as it were, with 10 of the greatest pianists of our age.'



'Though often in the shadow of Wozzeck, Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* emerged, for me, as perhaps the greatest opera of the Second Viennese School,' says our Collection author **DAVID PATRICK STEARNS**. 'The layered orchestration forces conductors into decisions that make the opera feel significantly different at nearly every encounter.'



'As a fervent fan of Horowitz during my teenage years, it was hardly surprising that I was similarly bowled over by his erstwhile pupil Byron Janis,' says this issue's Icons writer **JEREMY NICHOLAS**. 'Though his career was compromised by physical problems, I think he was one of the most electrifying pianists of the past century.'

THE REVIEWERS Andrew Achenbach • Nalen Anthoni • Tim Ashley • Mike Ashman • Richard Bratby • Edward Breen • Philip Clark • Alexandra Coghlan • Rob Cowan (consultant reviewer) • Jeremy Dibble • Peter Dickinson • Jed Distler • Adrian Edwards • Richard Fairman • David Fallows • David Fanning • Iain Fenlon • Neil Fisher • Fabrice Fitch • Jonathan Freeman-Attwood • Charlotte Gardner • Caroline Gill • David Gutman • Christian Hoskins • Lindsay Kemp • Philip Kennicott • Richard Lawrence • Andrew Mellor • Kate Molleson • Ivan Moody • Bryce Morrison • Hannah Nepil • Jeremy Nicholas • Christopher Nickol • Geoffrey Norris • Richard Osborne • Stephen Plaistow • Mark Pullinger • Peter Quantrill • Guy Rickards • Malcolm Riley • Marc Rochester • Patrick Rucker • Julie Anne Sadie • Edward Seckerson • Hugo Shirley • Pwyll ap Siôn • Harriet Smith • David Patrick Stearns • David Threasher • David Vickers • John Warrack • Richard Whitehouse • Arnold Whittall • Richard Wigmore • William Yeoman

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Phone 020 7738 5454 Fax 020 7733 2325
email gramophone@markallengroup.com
EDITOR AND PUBLISHER Martin Cullingford
DEPUTY EDITOR Sarah Kirkup / 020 7501 6365
REVIEWS EDITOR Hugo Shirley / 020 7501 6367
ONLINE CONTENT EDITOR James McCarthy / 020 7501 6366

SUB-EDITOR David Threasher / 020 7501 6370
ART DIRECTOR Dimah Lone / 020 7501 6689
PICTURE EDITOR Sunita Sharma-Gibson / 020 7501 6369

AUDIO EDITOR Andrew Everard
EDITORIAL ADMINISTRATOR Libby McPhee
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THANKS TO Hannah Nepil, Marija Đurić Speare and Charlotte Gardner
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF James Jolly

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email gramophone.ads@markallengroup.com

SALES MANAGER
Esther Zuke / 020 7501 6368

SALES EXECUTIVE
Simon Davies / 020 7501 6373

SUBSCRIPTIONS AND BACK ISSUES
0800 137201 (UK) +44 (0)1722 716997 (overseas)
subscriptions@markallengroup.com

PUBLISHING

Phone 020 7738 5454
HEAD OF MARKETING AND DIGITAL

STRATEGY Luca Da Re / 020 7501 6362
MARKETING EXECUTIVE Edward Criggs / 020 7501 6384

DIRECTOR, INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT Matthew Cianfrani

PRODUCTION DIRECTOR Richard Hamshire / 01722 716997

PRODUCTION MANAGER Jon Redmayne

CIRCULATION DIRECTOR Sally Boettcher / 01722 716997

SUBSCRIPTIONS MANAGER Chris Hoskins / 01722 716997

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR Martin Cullingford

PUBLISHING DIRECTOR Paul Georgiegan

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Ben Allen

CHAIRMAN Mark Allen



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DECCA



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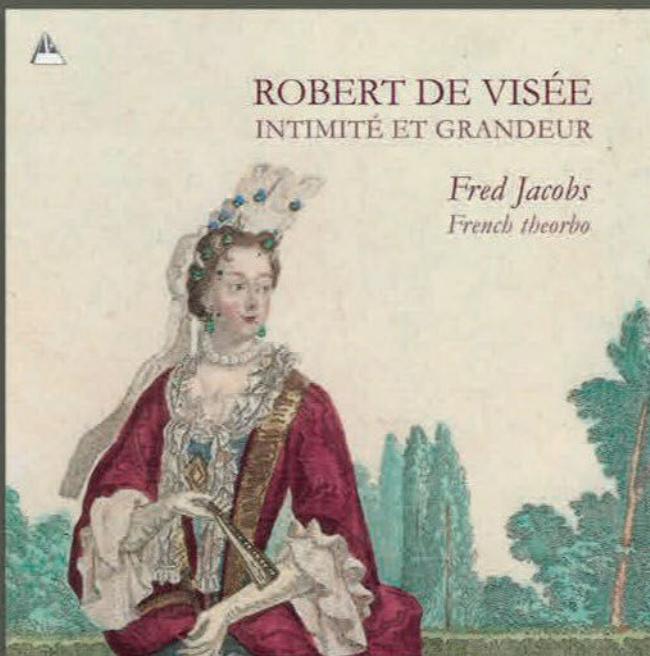
NEW RELEASES

Fred Jacobs - Theorbo



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INTIMITÉ ET GRANDEUR

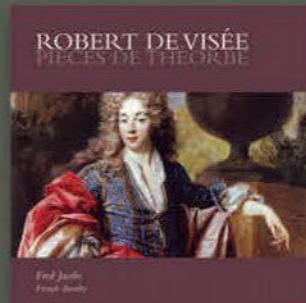
Fred Jacobs
French theorbo



METCD 1089 Vol 2
CONFIDENCES GALANTES

"Un album à découvrir" Classica
"It's tempting to think that De Visée would have played with as much luminous introspection and subtle manipulation of muted colours as Jacobs displays here." Gramophone

[IRR]



METCD 1072 Vol 1
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***** Goldberg
"Jacobs plays a French theorbo by luthier Michael Lowe, the sound is quite wonderful: clear, rich and sonorous, with a piquancy all of its own. A superb release." Gramophone

METCD 1090 Vol 3
INTIMITÉ ET GRANDEUR

"Fred Jacobs's playing is exquisite, drawing on the full range and depth of the plucked sounds, conjuring a vanished world of intimacy and grandeur." The Observer



Fred Jacobs & French Theorbo

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With Charles Daniels, Tenor

Lambert was one of the most accomplished craftsmen of the art of "ruelettes" Charles Daniels and Fred Jacobs perform gallant "airs" for the French nobility.

"Le théorbe délicat et souple de Fred Jacobs s'accorde parfaitement à la poésie" Diapason



METCD 1086
THE BROKEN CONSORT
Matthew Locke

"A wonderful way to discover the early English baroque...the aural equivalent of eating dark chocolate." BBC Radio 3 Record Review

GRAMOPHONE Editor's choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings from this month's reviews



RECORDING OF THE MONTH



BACEWICZ
Complete
String Quartets
Silesian Quartet
Chandos
► RICHARD
BRATBY'S REVIEW
IS ON PAGE 28

This may be new music to you – it was to me – but these seven quartets offer a superb entrance into a sound world that journeys from the neo-classical to a modernist voice of great originality.



SHOSTAKOVICH
Symphonies Nos 5, 8 & 9
Boston Symphony Orchestra / Andris Nelsons
DG

Symphony No 10 from the same forces was our Recording of the Month last August. A year on, and this further selection shows just the same power and passion.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 43



TCHAIKOVSKY
Symphonies Nos 1, 2 & 5
Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra / Vasily Petrenko
Onyx

An auspicious beginning to what could turn out to be an excellent cycle from Petrenko, one which really engages with the drama and detail of these symphonies.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 46



RILEY 'Four Four Three'
Ragazze Quartet et al
Channel Classics
A hugely enjoyable and distinctive response to the

challenge – or freedoms – Terry Riley set for an undetermined number of musicians. An iconic work, excellently recorded by our current label of the year.

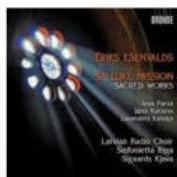
► REVIEW ON PAGE 54



'BACH ALL'ITALIANO'
Simon Borutzki rec et al
Klanglogo
Young recorder player Simon Borutzki is highly

impressive in this performance of, among other pieces, Bach's transcriptions for harpsichord of violin concertos, now arranged for recorder – just listen!

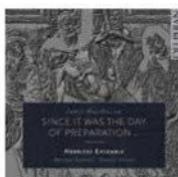
► REVIEW ON PAGE 58



EŠENVALDS Passion According to St Luke
Latvian Radio Choir / Sigvards Kļava
Ondine
Beginning in a

moment of high drama – the crowd's shouting 'Crucify him' – Ešenvalds's 2014 Passion setting offers listeners varied musical styles and superb performances.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 76



MacMILLAN
Since it was the Day of Preparation...
Hebrides Ensemble
Delphian
The second

fascinating modern Gospel setting in this month's selection – this time of the final sections from St John: a powerful work of personal faith by James MacMillan.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 79



DVD/BLU-RAY
HANDEL Alcina
Sols incl Petibon and Jaroussky;
Freiburg Baroque Orchestra / Andrea Marcon
Erato

Katie Mitchell's 2015 production from the Aix Festival, complete with fine music-making from Patricia Petibon, conductor Andrea Marcon and their colleagues.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 90



REISSUE/ARCHIVE
MARTHA ARGERICH
'Early Recordings'

DG
Performances from the '60s reveal – if needed – just what a visionary and compelling pianist Argerich has always been.

► REVIEW ON PAGE 70

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FOR THE RECORD



After 15 years, the Peruvian tenor Juan Diego Flórez is leaving Decca for Sony Classical

Juan Diego Flórez signs exclusive recording deal with Sony Classical

Tenor Juan Diego Flórez is joining the Sony Classical label after 15 years with Decca. Although Sony has yet to announce details of the first disc, a release date of autumn 2017 has been given.

'Recordings are such a different means of expression for an opera singer,' said Flórez, reflecting on his new contract. 'Musically, they allow you to explore and try new and exciting things, such as new colours and ways of interpretation. Working in the studio has fascinated me for a long time and I am full of new ideas I want to realise with Sony. I look forward to working with the Sony team to bring great recordings to music lovers around the world.'

The Peruvian singer's recent Decca releases have included a number of recitals, including 'Italia' (a programme of Neapolitan and Italian songs) in 2015 and 'L'Amour' (French operatic repertoire) in 2014, while he can be seen on DVD in sets including Bellini's *I puritani* and Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*.

(both Decca), as well as Donizetti's *La fille du régiment* on the Erato label, in which he stars alongside Natalie Dessay in a Royal Opera House production directed by Laurent Pelly that was widely acclaimed.

The President of Sony Classical, Bogdan Roscic, said: 'Seeing and hearing Juan Diego Flórez in full flight is one of the greatest experiences in today's opera world. His personality, his immense musicality and the unmistakably individual sound of his voice have made him one of the few true superstars in the theatre, but also beyond it. I look forward to working with him on adding exciting new recordings to what is already an outstanding discography.'

Among the other singers Flórez joins on the Sony Classical roster are tenor Jonas Kaufmann and the recently signed baritone Benjamin Appl.

Flórez is singing at this year's Last Night of the Proms at the Royal Albert Hall on September 10. The concert will be broadcast live on BBC One, BBC Two and Radio 3.

Prize-winning guitarist Thibaut Garcia is snapped up by Erato

Erato has signed the guitarist Thibaut Garcia. Just 22 years old, Garcia – born in Toulouse to Spanish and French parents – has been playing guitar since the age of seven. He has received first prizes in a number of competitions, including the 2013 Seville International Guitar Competition and the 2015 Guitar Foundation of America Competition.

Ennio Morricone signs recording contract with Decca

The composer Ennio Morricone, who won an Oscar earlier this year for his score to Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight*, has signed a recording contract with Decca at the age of 87. The first album for Decca will feature a selection from Morricone's most revered film scores, conducted by the composer himself, and will be released on October 7.

Jaap van Zweden extends contract with Hong Kong Phil

Jaap van Zweden has reaffirmed his commitment to the Hong Kong Philharmonic by signing a three-year contract extension that will see him remain as the orchestra's Music Director until 2022. It has been quite a year for van Zweden, who was announced as the next Music Director of the New York Philharmonic, a position he will formally assume in 2018. Van Zweden and the HK Phil have recently embarked on a new *Ring* cycle for Naxos; their first instalment, of *Das Rheingold*, was reviewed in November 2015.

Queen's Birthday Honours List celebrates classical music

The pianist Paul Lewis has been awarded a CBE and the trumpeter Alison Balsom (a former *Gramophone* Artist of the Year) an OBE in the Queen's Birthday Honours List. Balsom told the BBC: 'It is a fantastic message to the rest of the world that we in Britain consistently make this public recognition of individuals in the arts – which remain such an important part of our national identity.'

Jean-Philippe Rolland, the Executive Vice President of Artists & Repertoire at Warner Classics, referred to Garcia's 'distinctive and expressive technique and style', adding that he would 'no doubt follow in the footsteps of legends such as Andrés Segovia, Julian Bream, Angel Romero and Sharon Isbin'.

Garcia's first album for Erato – to be called 'Leyendas' and due for release in September – will embrace repertoire from both Spain and South America, including Piazzolla's *Four Seasons of Buenos Aires*, Albéniz's *Asturias* and Manjón's *Aire vasco*.



Huge honour: Alison Balsom has been given an OBE

Ian Rosenblatt, the Founder and Senior Partner of Rosenblatt Solicitors, has also been awarded an OBE for Rosenblatt Recitals and general music philanthropy. 'I am proud to do what I can to support young talent and make world-class music more accessible to the general British public,' he said.

Professor Colin Lawson, Director of the Royal College of Music, has been appointed a CBE. He said: 'The RCM has a spectacular history and we have a duty to innovate and future-proof this wonderful place of learning and creativity for future generations of exceptional young musicians.'

Lukáš Vondráček wins the Queen Elisabeth Competition

The winner of this year's Queen Elisabeth Competition, worth £20,000, is the Czech pianist Lukáš Vondráček. He performed Rachmaninov's Third Piano Concerto in the final round, accompanied by Marin Alsop and the National Orchestra of Belgium. A four-disc box-set featuring live performances from the semi-finals and finals of the competition has been issued; visit cmireb.be for more information.

PHOTOGRAPHY: KRISTIN HOEBERMAN, A. WANG

Deutsche Grammophon signs 15-year-old violinist Daniel Lozakovich

While his young age will undoubtedly grab attention, it's worth noting that, in signing for DG, Daniel Lozakovich follows in the footsteps of Anne-Sophie Mutter, who also made her first recording for DG aged 15, in Mozart's Third and Fifth Violin Concertos with Herbert von Karajan and the Berlin Philharmonic. Violinist David Garrett made his first recording for the Yellow Label at around that age, too, having signed a contract with DG aged 13.

Lozakovich's deal is described as 'a long-term association' and will begin with two orchestral albums and a recital disc. Beethoven's Violin Concerto is set to be among the first releases.

'Daniel displays all the attributes, the inordinate talent and the necessary dedication to achieve the kind of inspired classical music performance which is the hallmark of each and every musician at home on DG's roster, both past and present,' said President Clemens Trautmann. 'More pertinently, Daniel's signing reflects our commitment to the bright and exciting future of classical music recording – a future which he perfectly embodies. We are sure his artistry will both delight existing classical fans and appeal to and inspire a younger generation, drawing them into a new musical world.'

Lozakovich can in fact already be heard on a DG recording: he partnered Daniel Hope in a Bartók violin duo on Hope's recent album 'My Tribute to Yehudi Menuhin' (4/16).



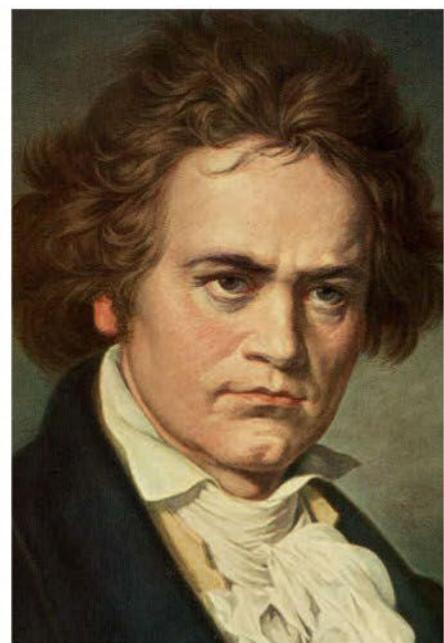
Young talent: Daniel Lozakovich signs to DG at 15

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THE 50 GREATEST BEETHOVEN RECORDINGS

Following the overwhelming popularity of our list of the 50 Greatest Mozart Recordings, we have now gathered 50 of the finest recordings of Beethoven's music – *Gramophone* Award-winning albums, Recordings of the Month and Editor's Choice discs, from legendary performers like Artur Schnabel and Otto Klemperer to modern masters like Isabelle Faust and Riccardo Chailly. We have also included, where possible, the complete original *Gramophone* reviews, which are drawn from *Gramophone*'s Reviews Database of more than 40,000 reviews.



BLOGS

In a new blog for *Gramophone*, Sir Willard White recalls his early musical influences and the struggles he faced as a young singer, and explains why these experiences have inspired him to help and encourage the next generation of singers by giving them precious performance opportunities and masterclasses.

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*Michael McManus invites
10 of today's leading pianists to
discuss 10 great examples of the*

PIANO CONCERTO

The great Polish composer Witold Lutosławski once said: 'I love traditional instruments – though of course they are anachronisms... Satellites run around our planet, but we still play bassoons... It's ridiculous.' At around the time he expressed this whimsically provocative sentiment, he wrote a piano concerto. Even today, it's a form that tempts composers. The tonalities, forms and orchestrations may shift – and an infinity of variations on the 'soloist versus orchestra', 'soloist as part of texture' and 'soloist as counterpoint' debates will no doubt be played out, for as long as music is loved.

Yet the basic fascination persists: a concert grand sharing a platform or a studio with an orchestra. It works. It inspires great music, as it has done for centuries; it inspires some of the greatest performances we hear; and, crudely, it puts bums on seats. It also, of course, sells recordings. Just look at your own shelves or playlists. We know well that the performances we hear today will rarely come anywhere close to what 18th- or 19th-century audiences would have heard. The pianos are different; ever-improving piano-playing techniques have transformed the once near-impossible into the everyday; and orchestras, too, have grown in virtuosity. Even contemporary 'authentic' performances can give only an imperfect glimpse of what prompted our forebears to fall for the piano concerto.

What has not changed, however, is that sheer popularity of the piano concerto, for composers, performers and music lovers alike; and who does not have a favourite concert-hall memory of a piano concerto, a favourite CD, a favourite broadcast? Even among

the 10 works presented here, for me there are powerful associations. When I hear Beethoven's *Emperor*, my mind goes back to the one occasion when I heard Claudio Arrau in the concert hall, marking his 85th birthday with the LSO, Sir Colin Davis and this piece. It wasn't all immaculate, but, oh, the artistry!

When I discovered classical music as a teenager, I recall being transfixed when I accidentally came across a TV relay of Alfred Brendel performing Mozart's last piano concerto at the Proms. I sought out a recording at my local WH Smith's and triumphantly unearthed a reduced-price cassette tape of the recording by Emil

Our 10 pianists and their recordings



Beethoven Piano Concerto No 5

Paul Lewis

Harmonia Mundi



Brahms Piano Concerto No 2

Nicholas Angelich

Erato



Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 2

Stephen Hough

Hyperion



Ravel Piano Concerto in G

Pierre-Laurent Aimard

DG

WIN a Kawai K200 upright piano

Kawai, in partnership with Jaques Samuel Pianos, is delighted to offer *Gramophone* readers the chance of winning a Kawai K200 piano. The K200, which retails at £4624, is the 114cm model in Kawai's K-Series range of professional upright pianos. It benefits from the company's innovative Millennium III action, incorporating ABS Carbon parts, and combines wonderful responsiveness with a full, engaging sound and elegant design. Jaques Samuel Pianos was established in 1935 and is the sole UK supplier of Fazioli pianos.

Its busy showrooms on London's Edgware Road host a full range of Kawai acoustic pianos, including the exclusive, artisan-crafted range of Shigeru Kawai grands.



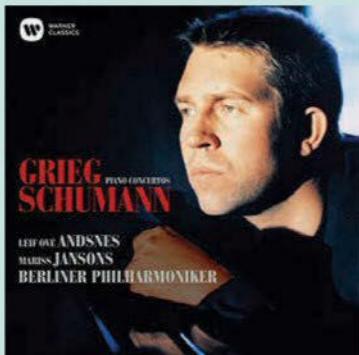
To find out how to enter the competition and for full terms & conditions, please visit gramophone.co.uk/kawai
Deadline for entry is September 15, 2016

Gilels, little knowing that it was a classic of the gramophone – a supreme example of the perfect marriage between a composition, a soloist, an orchestra and a conductor (Eugen Jochum). Both Shostakovich No 2 and the Ravel in G I discovered in the now rather dated recordings by Leonard Bernstein, who

conducted from the keyboard. I loved them too. As for Brahms No 2, has anyone surpassed Leon Fleisher's great Cleveland recording with George Szell?

Well, I have made my point. The piano concerto is a staple of the recording studio, as it is of the concert hall. For such a well-established form,

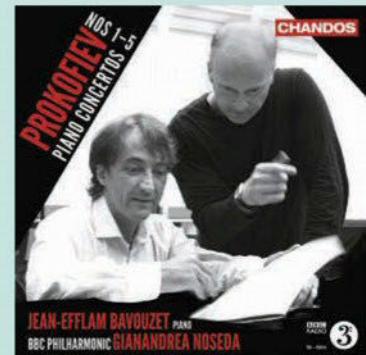
it seems as fresh today as it ever did, both in performance and in the minds of composers. I hope these 10 pieces, capturing the voices of 10 fine pianists speaking of works in which they excel, will enhance readers' appreciation of works with which they are (almost certainly) already extremely familiar. **G**



Grieg Piano Concerto
Leif Ove Andsnes
Warner Classics



Mozart Piano Concerto No 27, K595
Angela Hewitt
Hyperion



Prokofiev Piano Concerto No 3
Jean-Efflam Bavouzet
Chandos



Schumann Piano Concerto
Ingrid Fliter
Linn Records



Shostakovich Piano Concerto No 2
Alexander Melnikov
Harmonia Mundi



Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 1
Yevgeny Sudbin
BIS

Beethoven Piano Concerto No 5

Paul Lewis

For the British pianist, the 'Emperor' is a robust concerto which feels fresh every time

The *Emperor* Concerto is one of those pieces by Beethoven where logic comes to the fore. The inherent, logical beauty of the way in which it's structured makes it so satisfying; the journey seems complete. I probably first listened to it when I was eight or nine years old, and I remember just thinking, 'This is proper music!' I didn't know why that was, but I think it's the completeness and the logic of the journey that came through.

We think of it quite stereotypically as a big-boned symphonic work – which it is in many ways – but I've always felt that the real challenge of this piece, certainly in playing it, is in finding the balance. You can become quite overwhelmed with the symphonic nature of it, but it's so much more than that. It's chamber music as well, and you can find that, one minute, you're part of a huge orchestral texture and then, the next, you're having to rise above it as a sort of stereotypical soloist; and after that, you could be balancing with just *pizzicato* strings or a single wind instrument. It's about switching from one thing to another and finding the right balance which for me is the challenge in playing this piece.

PIANISTICALLY CHALLENGING

The concerto feels fresh every time. I'm probably not talented enough for it *not* to be fresh, because I have to work at it: I can never just sit down and play it. I find it pianistically challenging enough to have to take it very seriously every time. The characters within it are so vivid. In the slow movement, there's such ethereal tenderness and warmth that one can see how it inspired Schumann in the last movement of his *Fantasie*, Op 17.

The character of this piece is already quite obvious, and if you go for contrast I don't believe you should underline things that are already obvious. It's something that Beethoven does for you, and if you're true to the characters that are there it speaks for itself.

The concerto is pianistically quite awkward in places, though possibly not quite as pianistically difficult as it sounds because it's so well written. It lies quite well under the hands, which you can't say for all of Beethoven's piano music. He's so bloody-minded he doesn't really care if it's comfortable or not. There's a physicality about it, that's the difficulty, and you can really sense that physicality, I think, when you hear it. The Fourth Concerto is, to my mind, the most difficult of the five, but perhaps doesn't

sound as obviously difficult to the listener as the Fifth, because the difficulties are far more subtle and concealed, and relate far more to the fragility of the music. The Fifth is incredibly robust.

ENTHUSIASING THE ORCHESTRA

With the Fourth you can totally destroy a performance if you don't have a good co-operation between yourself and the conductor. Whereas in the Fifth, good co-operation is, of course, preferable, but there's something about the music which means it can take a bit more of a beating.

In pieces that are played a lot, like this one, sometimes I think you find that there are certain ways of doing things for the orchestra, certain ways of managing corners. If you don't want to follow the path of least resistance, if you want to do things a little differently, it sometimes takes a bit of work to get out of the routine or the habit of doing it in a certain way – but if your approach is characterful, and your enthusiasm for the piece comes across, the orchestra usually follow.

A lot of the music I've recorded has been recorded many times, so I try not to think about what I'm doing in that context. Recording this piece with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Jiří Bělohlávek was very easy. It was just a pleasure. The orchestra were on top of it, Jiří was a joy to work with and it was just very straightforward. There were no unnecessary barriers. It was just a nice experience.

INVOLVING THE AUDIENCE

I think the audience really does float away with joy in the slow movement. If you can manage the character and you can find the right sound, the first piano entry in the slow movement is one of those spine-tingling moments. Otherwise, I think it's the vividness of the character of this piece which is responsible for a lot of its popularity. Goodness knows how many times I've played this by now, but there's still something about the orchestration of that first chord which is so pleasing and satisfying. All these little details have a positive effect – this is a piece that we feel good listening to. It's an extrovert drama with an introverted middle which ends with a dance, as do all Beethoven concertos; but it's the roundedness of the journey, the overall experience, which allows us to feel that we've heard something truly complete.



Brahms Piano Concerto No 2

Nicholas Angelich

The American-born, Paris-trained pianist on Brahms's 'symphony with piano obbligato'

When I was a student at the Paris Conservatoire, I started by learning this piece, not Brahms's First Concerto. Many people were more attracted initially to the latter, maybe because it has a typically Romantic feeling about it, a dramatic gesture. Perhaps it often appeals to younger, or maybe even not so young, performers because there is this dark Romantic quality to it, this terribly tragic atmosphere around it: the whole connection with Schumann and his suicide attempt, and all the incredible emotional outpouring, the reaction to all of this. And, of course, it feels like the music of a younger man – which may be a simplistic thing to say, but I really think there is a kind of quality there that might be more instantly appealing. Right from the start it is completely new and experimental.

The Second Concerto (written more than two decades later) is experimental too, but it's a bit more complicated. I was more attracted to it because I had listened to it much more at home with my parents. I was very familiar with it and had several recordings I really loved. The one I loved the most was by Wilhelm Backhaus – it was a huge source of inspiration and joy.

There's a subtle kind of maturity in the way that Brahms expresses himself in the piano-writing, in how he constructs the piece and in the orchestra's interaction with the piano. As I said, this piece's character is very different from that of the First Concerto: it's a completely different universe in terms of sound, emotions, inspiration – everything.

My teacher, Aldo Ciccolini, wanted me to play the Rachmaninov Third. I started working on it, but it didn't interest me at all at the time. When I asked him if I could work on this instead, he was apprehensive, thinking that this was more a piece for an older musician, with a more mature point of view, more experience in music and in life in general – but I stuck to my desires and my ideas.

SIMPLE YET COMPLEX

Ciccolini was very demanding, but it was a great learning experience. It is of course an extremely difficult piece in peculiar ways because, pianistically, technically, the language that Brahms uses to express his ideas is very simple, but at the same time very complex, very difficult, very elaborate and very subtle. It's a symphony, really, with piano obbligato; and it's always important to have an understanding with the conductor. If you don't have a good relationship, it's very difficult because if you're not happy with the tempo, if you're not happy with something, there's not really that much you can do. The piano



is, of course, a very important element, but at the same time it needs to integrate into the whole structure, which is very difficult and makes the piece very different from other piano concertos. There is an incredible amount of interaction and you have to think about the unity. This can be very beautiful but, at the same time, it's one of the most challenging aspects of the piece. There's an incredible variety of things going on, but there has to be a sense of structure. This is connected with tempo, with many things, including sound.

The first movement has such incredible scope, and the way Brahms develops all of the thematic material is quite amazing. Then you have this second movement, where there is a very grand quality and, suddenly, this duet with the principal cello in the third movement – a beautiful moment of intimacy and peace which is so touching. There's a lot of things like that going on in the other movements too, but this section really is a duet. It has a special quality. I also think it's necessary, just in terms of having a moment of, not relaxing, but of gathering your energy and expressing things in a totally different way. It helps you. No matter how many times you've heard it, no matter how many times you've played it, it's always so moving.

After everything that has happened musically, emotionally, in terms of the orchestra, in terms of the colours... After all of this, suddenly you have this last movement which does have depth, but which is also very light. There's a dancing quality to it, and it has incredible grace and charm. There is also that beautiful Hungarian theme. You can feel these Hungarian and Viennese qualities; and the orchestration is so beautiful. It's truly a masterpiece – the focus here is about being playful, having fun.

PUTTING THE MUSIC FIRST

There are some very difficult moments in the whole concerto, and I think it's important never to think of these as 'virtuosic'. The solution is to think of things in a musical way – how do you make sense musically of something? It should obviously not be superficial, but when you're just trying to understand pianistically how to do things better, you must think in a musical way. It should never be just about technique.

I made my recording with the Frankfurt Radio Orchestra and Paavo Järvi. He's a wonderful musician, with a lot of humour. He's very demanding and inspiring to work with. He had a clear understanding about details and, of course, about the structure and the sense of how to make things work. He's an interesting musician. You need to have this kind of partnership with somebody you can really understand, who understands you and the piece, with whom you can build something momentous.

Grieg Piano Concerto

Leif Ove Andsnes

The Norwegian pianist grew up with Grieg's famous concerto, yet still finds it a force of nature

When he was 15, Grieg heard Clara Schumann play her husband's piano concerto, and his own early piano music is highly influenced by Schumann and, to a certain degree, also Mendelssohn.

Grieg wrote his concerto in 1868, at a time when music came easily to him. He was 25 and happy: he had met Nina, was in Denmark, and had finished his studies and found his voice. In a way, it's his best period. Later he wrote some wonderful music, but he always struggled with it. His Piano Concerto is the only large-scale piece where he doesn't seem to struggle with transitions. Everything flows so naturally.

The obvious Schumann influence is seen in the fanfare-like opening in the piano, with descending chords from treble down to bass, and the first theme presented by the winds and then by the piano. Then you have piano figurations, arpeggios, which are asymmetrical – you have five per beat, which gives this floating feeling just like in the Schumann. In the development section, piano arpeggios accompany wind solos – also taken from Schumann. The first-movement structure draws on the way Schumann built his concerto, but the emotional content and character are different.

The Schumann is sophisticated in its varied reusing of motifs and themes – it is urban and intellectual as well as Romantically confessional. Grieg is much more a force of nature. His is a grand statement from a young man who really wants to conquer the world. It has a kind of openness to it that you don't find in the Schumann. Also, Grieg goes for flashy effects which Schumann would never think of, such as the big octave passage, clearly inspired by Liszt and Tchaikovsky.

FIRST-BAR PERILS

When you start rehearsals with an orchestra, some of the musicians laugh at the pathos of that beginning, because it's somehow too famous to be taken seriously. Our duty is to take it seriously – to imagine how Grieg felt it, and what it was like at the premiere. The sound of the timpani, then this huge A minor chord very high up in the treble, is quite extraordinary. When I played this piece at the beginning of my career, I often broke a treble piano string in the first bar – because the piano hadn't been used until that moment and then suddenly there's enormous pressure on the high treble.

Fortunately, later on in the piece you're not up there as much, so you don't hear the clanging noise of a loose string.

The huge contrast between this drama and the pure simplicity of the first theme adds to the fascination of the piece. Those

chords are so beautiful played very plainly. There are normal triads and then a dissonant one with four notes – small details like this are important in this piece. And when you're sensitive to them, that's when a performance works.

FOLK INFLUENCES

After the Schumann-influenced beginning, the piece becomes more Norwegian. There is an *animato* section that is like a Norwegian folk dance, with the emphasis on the weaker parts of the bar – the second and fourth beats. This flavour, of German Romanticism with a seed of folk music makes the piece unique.

The second theme of the first movement is curious. The harmonies unfold and you hear Grieg's 'signature': a combination of melodies that are very much like

folk melodies – they have a simplicity that makes them very touching. Hear two bars of one of his piano pieces containing this element and you know immediately that it's Grieg. Then he builds up and you have one of the first octave passages: our hero is making his mark again. The piece is full of contrasts between this huge passion and the simplicity of folk melodies.

Grieg must have loved the sound of the octave passages in the development section, something that Schumann would never have used so bluntly. When we come to the cadenza, it builds touchingly, with sad harmonies, then there's total silence. This pause is terribly important. Then there's the passage that builds up with waves in the bass of the piano, up and down, and tremolos, with lots of possibilities to create sound and grow bigger and bigger. If it's played well it's extremely effective, because it's like being in the ocean with huge waves. Grieg continues with this enormous roaring in the bass. Nobody has played this as phenomenally as Lipatti in his recording. I have no idea how he does it, but it sounds like a lion roar.

There is an ingenious element to the transition into the coda. In pieces from the Classical period, very often a piano cadenza will end with some trills; Grieg does the same with tremolos and trills, but then, instead of getting straight into the coda, he has four bars of the strings playing the most touching, painful inner harmonies, which create such depth and drama.



This sums it all up in an intimate way, which renders all that has happened before – all the pianistic effects – unflashy. Then he has a folk-like, very fast tune in the cadenza and finishes off with the same fanfare that he started with, this time in triplets, going from the top of the keyboard to the bottom and then up again – a new element and all very heroic.

EMBRACING NATURE

Then we come to the highlight, which is the beginning of the second movement. We have moved quite far away from the Schumann influence. This melody, the culmination of folk-like simplicity and tenderness, combined with a Tchaikovskian sweep in the longer phrases and the symphonic writing, always gets straight to people's hearts. The piano entrance is very simple but beautiful and tender, like small brooks of pure water. Later, when it opens up, it's like the beauty of nature unfolding itself. As always, it then becomes grand – you can imagine that Grieg is at the peak of the mountain now, looking out. At the end of the movement, he does something ingenious in the horn solo, which starts off with a concert F against the piano's D flat – a major third. Then the horn moves down to F flat, still against the piano's D flat, creating this feeling of nostalgia.

The last two bars here, and the first two bars of the next movement, are reminiscent of Beethoven's Fourth Piano Concerto: three chords in the strings, very soft, then a long one

Some musicians feel the Grieg is too famous to be taken seriously – but it's our duty to take it seriously

with the piano going up from the bass, just in the minor here, not the major. It's a curious thing and I'm sure Grieg must have known the Beethoven and been influenced by it.

The last movement is in a wonderful Norwegian dance rhythm again, and Grieg creates marvellous piano figurations. He was a good pianist, not a great one, and he wouldn't very often play this piece himself, but he did conduct it.

The middle part of the last movement features a beautiful and folk-like flute solo that reminds us of 'Morning Mood' from *Peer Gynt*. Percy Grainger wrote that Grieg played this passage with a restless, almost feverish emotionality but without a trace of sentimentality. Very often it's played in a slow, syrupy fashion, which doesn't make it so convincing. It's full of waves and contrasts, the huge octave passage before the coda reminding us of Tchaikovsky's First Piano Concerto. Grieg must have loved that effect and known that the audience would love it, too.

FINDING THE HONESTY

Recording the piece in Berlin with Mariss Jansons was special. There is such an honesty with him and never any trace of cynicism. With this piece, you need to believe in the pure feeling and passion of it, and Jansons is a master at that.

Grieg's world is not an inexhaustible one like, say, that of Bach, Beethoven or Mozart, but this is music that I've grown up with – it's such a signature piece, and the Morecambe and Wise sketch remains one of my all-time favourite bits of humour. It's remarkable that you can play the opening and people seem to know it. In fact, even if people haven't heard it before, they still get it. You just have to hear that roll on the timpani...



OTHELLO

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Royal Shakespeare Company

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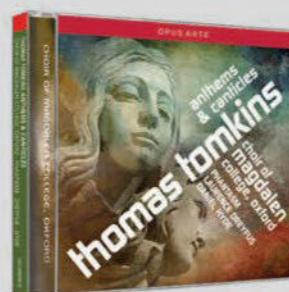


THE RAPE OF LUCRETIA

BRITTEN
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This production eloquently and tastefully tackles the difficult subject, which is lent emotional weight by 'Christine Rice's grandly sung Lucretia, noble in tone yet tragically vulnerable' (The Guardian ★★★★).

DVD & BLU-RAY

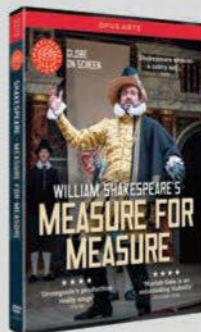


ANTHEMS & CANTICLES

THOMAS TOMKINS
Choir of Magdalen College, Oxford

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MEASURE FOR MEASURE

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DVD

Mozart Piano Concerto No 27

Angela Hewitt

For Hewitt, the transcendental power of Mozart's last piano concerto makes it emotional to play



The K595 Concerto stands out on its own. There's something quite particular about it that started in K503 and K537 – concertos that immediately preceded it and that are already a little bit different from the ones that came before them. This piece does have a certain feeling, and I don't think it's because we now know it's Mozart's last concerto because, of course, he didn't know it was going to be his last – but there's a paring down. Yet the harmonic language is becoming more daring, more surprising, and the overall mood is very melancholic. We know 1791 wasn't a very good time for the composer – he had fallen a bit out of favour in Vienna, he wasn't putting on his own concerts any more, his subscription series had fallen through, Constanze was always ill and he had only two pupils left – but in this year he did write an amazing amount of stuff.

Mozart wasn't just trying to show off any more, he was beyond that. When he was making his name in Vienna he had to please the Viennese, who could be quite fickle. He never wrote music just to entertain, but I think that by the time he got to this concerto he didn't care about that at all. It's important that he was no longer writing just to please his Viennese audience.

Even the way this concerto starts sets a mood, with its slow pulsing accompaniment in the lower strings, and then the theme that comes in. I don't think you can play it with the same

outlook as you'd play Mozart's other concertos. It's not a happy-go-lucky piece. If you play it in that mood you're missing something. There are a lot of sighing figures in it and a lot of really abrupt changes of key, especially in the development section of the first movement. In the passagework, every note has to sing and it shouldn't be too rushed. Nothing is there just for brilliant display.

DARING KEYS AND HARMONIES

The key changes in the first movement are radical. In the development we're thrown into a series of keys – B flat major, B minor, C major, E flat minor – and each key has to have its own character. These sudden shifts of mood are very important. In the development section, the structure is quite different from that in others of Mozart's concertos, with more repetition of the same material in different keys – something he had started to do a bit in K503. What strikes me the most is that even when the themes are in the major key they're really not that happy.

In the first movement Mozart put in so many daring harmonies, and in the second he wrote something drastically simple. The theme here is very bare first of all and doesn't travel much harmonically. It's one of his simplest. I've tried so many different tempos in this movement, and even when I was recording it we had two different versions. I don't think it

should be too slow. It's *Larghetto alla breve*, so two to the bar, not four; and because the harmonies aren't complicated, there has to be this lovely pulsing accompaniment in the left hand (the orchestra accompanies the theme later in bar 49). There's a bit of room for ornamentation in this movement as well. When you think of the slow movements of other concertos, such as K482 or K466, this is quite different in mood. There's a sadness behind it, which, I think, is carried along into the third movement.

The final movement is linked to the song that Mozart wrote about yearning for spring, *Sehnsucht nach dem Frühling*, K596, and you wonder if it was in his mind that he wouldn't see another spring. I like to carry on that mood a little bit, and then when the orchestra comes in it's more of a hunting song. In anything you interpret, if you change the tempo even the slightest amount it changes the character. So by not taking this last movement too fast, you do change the character. For me, the most magical moment is after the cadenza that Mozart left us, where that theme comes back and the orchestra comes in – that makes me cry every time. For me this piece is worth playing just for bar 281!

You need a feeling of intimacy – this is an intimate piece. If the performance goes well, you can't remain unmoved

In the development section of the last movement there are some extraordinary modulations. And I think that the transcendent aspect is very important. In a way, the first two movements keep us waiting for this finale. In some concertos, like the C minor (K491) and the D minor (K466), and many others, the first movement is already epic, but in this one, for me, everything leads to the last movement. Some last movements can be a happy finale to what's gone before, but if I see the whole piece as one arc, I see that it leads to this.

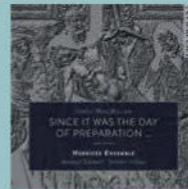
THE CHAMBER MUSIC APPROACH

It's a real experience to perform it. If the performance goes well you can't remain unmoved. When I conduct it myself, I treat it like chamber music. You have to be careful with dynamics and balance and the parts that need to be brought out, whereas in a piece like K537 it's more a case of the orchestra accompanying endless scales and arpeggios. But this is very much chamber music, and it's lovely to conduct it from the piano. I also think you need that feeling of intimacy – this is an intimate piece.

I've probably conducted it from the piano more than I have played it with a conductor, but it was great to work on it for the recording with Hannu Lintu, because he's a wonderful accompanist and takes such care over the orchestra. He also doesn't mind trying out different versions – well, not too much!

I believe this is one of the concertos of very few in the whole piano repertoire that really is transcendent. I don't say that lightly. I think the ones that have that power are this one, Beethoven's Fourth, Brahms's First and Bach's D minor Keyboard Concerto – works that just take you to a higher place. And this one does it mainly because of the theme in the last movement. When it comes back at the end, it is so heartbreakingly. To what extent did he know that he wasn't going to live very much longer? I think there must have been some kind of premonition.

DELPHIAN



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Brindley Sherratt, Synergy Vocals, Hebrides Ensemble

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CD34180

Stabat Mater: sacred choral music by Lennox & Michael Berkeley

The Marian Consort, Berkeley Ensemble / David Wordsworth

Lennox Berkeley's *Stabat Mater* derives from one of the most fertile and inspired periods of his compositional life. Until now the last of his major works to go unrecorded, it was written for a concert tour by his close friend Benjamin Britten's English Opera Group; hence the unusual but effective scoring for six solo voices and twelve instrumentalists. Delphian artists The Marian Consort – with five acclaimed discs of early music to their credit – now show their versatility in a cappella and accompanied music by both Lennox and his son Michael Berkeley. They are partnered in the larger works by the Berkeley Ensemble, and by conductor David Wordsworth, who has known and worked with both composers, and who here fulfils a long-cherished ambition to direct this important addition to the catalogue.

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CD34167



Duet: Mendelssohn – Schumann – Cornelius
Lucy Crowe, William Berger, Iain Burnside

Duet singing reached its zenith in the Victorian age, and has since fallen out of fashion. Did artists become concerned with grander solo projects? Did audiences think duets too lowbrow? William Berger follows up his acclaimed Delphian debut recital with Iain Burnside, in a programme of duets with the delectably voiced Lucy Crowe that resoundingly demonstrates just how musically rich the genre can be. Published sets and individual songs by Mendelssohn, Schumann and the slightly younger Peter Cornelius span the middle decades of nineteenth-century Germany, and also represent the literary life of the country in that period. Nestled at the end of the disc, ravishingly beautiful and sad, is Schumann's memorial to his deceased young son.

'In casting, revelatory programming and true vocal chamber music-making, this CD is a small miracle to be cherished'

— BBC Music Magazine, March 2016, CHORAL & SONG CHOICE

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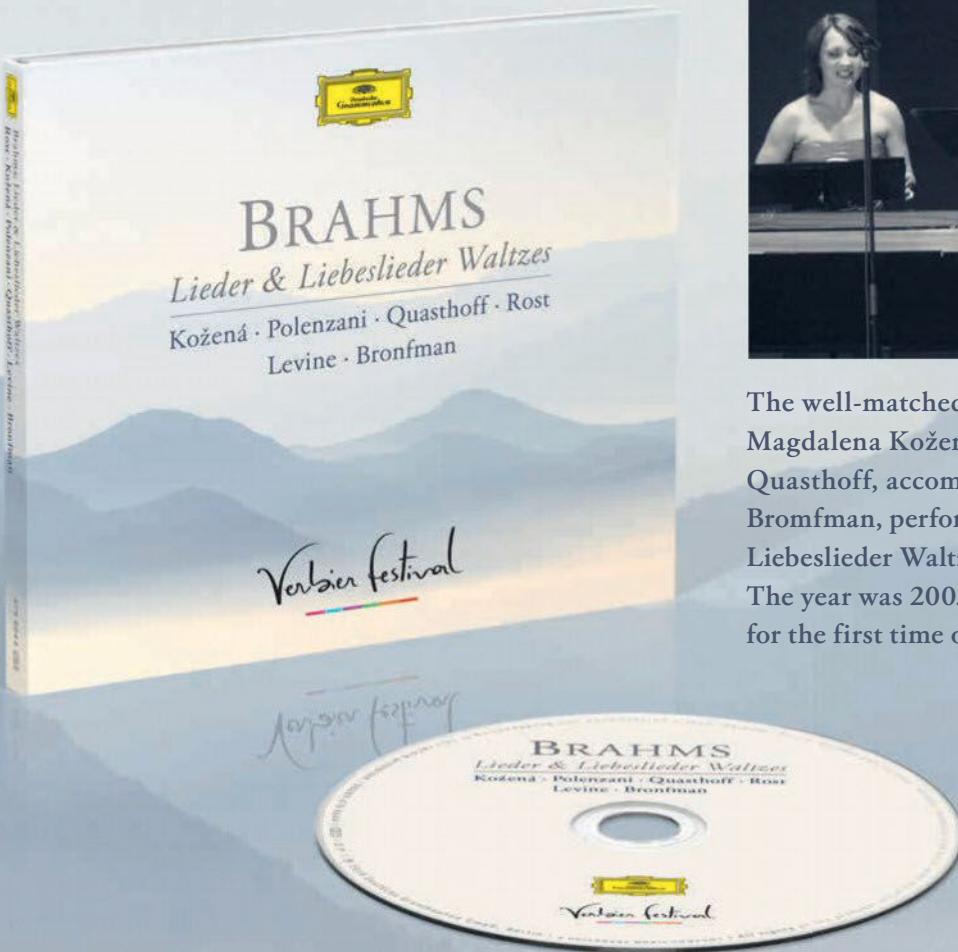


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BRAHMS

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The well-matched quartet of singers Andrea Rost, Magdalena Kožená, Matthew Polenzani and Thomas Quasthoff, accompanied by James Levine and Yefim Bronfman, perform Brahms solo lieder and both sets of the Liebeslieder Waltzes before a festival audience in Verbier. The year was 2003. Now the complete concert is available for the first time on a generous 80-minute CD.

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Prokofiev Piano Concerto No 3

Jean-Efflam Bavouzet

Tricky fingerings, hand-crossing...Prokofiev pushes his pianist to the limits, says Bavouzet

There is a logic to the fact that, of all Prokofiev's five piano concertos, the Third is the most famous and the most played. It's simpler and more classical in its structure than the others; and it has very effective moments that you really remember after the piece has finished. Paradoxically, No 5 is my favourite, with its kaleidoscope of different moods – it changes so much that you need to hear it several times to understand it.

Structurally, the Third is probably the least adventurous of the five concertos, but it does contain the composer's trademarks: ballet, fairy tale, magic, sarcasm, irony – and virtuosity. If you don't have success with this piece on stage, you should change your job!

UNUSUAL CONTEXTS

The beauty of the opening of the first movement is something you don't forget. There's no real development section, just a repeat of the melody with increasing enthusiasm. Between the first and second times there's this no-man's-land where Prokofiev seems to observe from a distance the music that's to come. I think this passage is the most original thing in the entire concerto. There's an entrance of the piano that includes probably the only example of the use of castanets in a context unconnected with Spanish music. Prokofiev wanted something distinctive; a woodblock would be too thin, so he opted for castanets. At the end of the first movement, for the first time in the concerto, Prokofiev employs something he will use in the Fourth and Fifth: the same musical material but played faster. The coda is a fast version of the recapitulation.

Ballet is what the *andantino* of the second-movement theme is all about – you really have the sense that a curtain is opening on to another world. You want it to be gentle and charming in the first variation when the piano enters. (Incidentally, it's only the first rhythm that is common to all variations.) The second variation is jubilant; the piano part is marked *tempestoso*, featuring some of Prokofiev's spectacular, unplayable hand-crossing. Apparently, Prokofiev had very long arms and, for him, playing bass notes with the right hand and top notes with the left seems not to have been a problem. This variation ends with a kind of knockout. Then comes what I call the Messiaen variation, which Prokofiev plays so fast in his own recording of the work.

FREEZING TEMPERATURES

There's an interesting fourth variation, *meditativo*, featuring a dialogue between the piano and the horn; and here the temperature is freezing – Prokofiev writes *freddo* (Italian for cold) in the score. I call this variation the Russian winter – suddenly everything freezes over. You have the same tonality and mood in Rachmaninov's *Paganini* Variations, where the strings have to play *tremolo* just as they do here. This could almost be considered as the centre of the piece. Then, *poco a poco*, the theme comes back. (The use of the bass drum is unusual.) There's a kind of postlude, and the piece could easily finish here – this is quite the most dramatic moment. The piano is making a *ritorno assai* in E minor and the orchestra is finishing in E major. The E minor key is like a death sentence, along with the bass drum – it makes you realise the piece is not funny at all, that death has always been present.

The third movement is like one great *crescendo*. It starts at a moderate tempo and dynamic, but the death atmosphere is not over yet. A few pages later you have the same music played again but faster this time, and there's a kind of turbulence. Then

this dies completely and there's a beautifully shaped melody – it's probably the only hummable melody in all the concertos. Between the first and second presentations of the melody we have another no-man's-land. With all the chords, and the melody doubled with the cellos, we think of Messiaen. Then, when the melody occurs for the third and fourth time, there's this configuration for which the pianist should have three hands, because the melody is played in the middle, but you also have arpeggios. The fifth time the melody comes is the climax (it's similar to the First Concerto in that the melody is played five times), and there's some almost-unbearable chromaticism.

ALL FINGERS AND (NO) THUMBS

When the fifth occurrence of the melody has passed, we have one of those moments of pure excitement, building up to a kind of complete madness – to the point where the firefighter has to be called to calm everyone down. It includes the only example I know of in piano literature where the pianist must play two keys with one finger. I must confess, I cannot do that. My fingers are not trained to play that way. The thumb, yes, but not the fingers!



Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 2

Stephen Hough

Rachmaninov is unsurpassed when it comes to producing colour from harmony, says Hough

This amazing, famous and wonderful piano concerto is very original, although you can hear that it draws upon Tchaikovsky's First in certain stylistic respects, most obviously at the end; Tchaikovsky invented this way of having a wonderful big tune that sums up the whole experience of the piece, then a final two minutes with the pianist rushing all over the keyboard with tremendous virtuosity. So in the final three minutes you get a double punch of all the emotion and excitement that's there; and then after the piece is over there's the applause, which I think is also a part of the music, part of what both composers expected to happen. I think if you imagine the end of Tchaikovsky's First or Rachmaninov's Second without applause, it feels like a leg's been cut off. The piece leads towards that climax, that ending. It's a certain Romantic concerto formula, but I don't think anyone's really managed to do it quite as well as it's done here, except perhaps Rachmaninov himself in his Third Piano Concerto.

He wrote the Second Concerto in 1900-01, pretty much at the beginning of his career, when he still thought of himself primarily as a composer rather than a pianist. By the time of the Third, he was playing more (he wrote that one for his first US tour), and then he stopped writing altogether for a good decade when he left Russia and was earning money by having to play a lot of concerts. The Second Concerto is very awkward to play. Rachmaninov was one of the greatest pianists of all time, but he hadn't written that much for piano when he wrote this piece; by the time he'd written the Third you already feel there's a lot more experience in his writing for the instrument. There are more notes, but it lies so much more easily under the hands.

THE BEGINNING

Until around the Second World War, a pianist did not walk out on to the stage and start to play a piece. He or she would walk out and improvise a few bars, then start the piece. This is true right back to the time of Mozart and Beethoven. This piece does just this – you walk out and start warming up, playing a few chords, from the softest you can play, to the loudest you can play. You're testing the instrument, you're testing the audience, you're quietening down the audience,

you're putting the audience in the mood of the piece and you're playing these rich wonderful chords – Rachmaninov knew so well how to make colour out of harmony. Then you land on the loudest chords and start warming up with arpeggios – you're testing the strength and agility of your fingers. For the next few minutes, you don't really hear the pianist. He or she is playing away, and the orchestra's playing this wonderful tune with an orchestration that's thick enough virtually to cover the piano. We know Rachmaninov was a nervous performer – most great pianists are nervous – and this is the perfect opening for a nervous pianist.

Then you have an awkward sparkly passage, flourishing when it goes *più mosso*. You're ready to go, and Rachmaninov gives you not virtuosity, but one of the most beautiful melodies he's ever written. He wins over the hearts of the audience by playing a tune by which no one can fail to be melted. That's the psychology of this piece. It was his breakthrough – the first piece that put him on the map. It's not cutting edge, but there he was with the great masters of the 20th century. I'd put him there with the Stravinskys and the Schoenbergs and the other seminal forces without whom music of the last century would be unthinkable.



GORGEOUS TUNES

This concerto is one that's never been cut and never been thought to be possible to cut. The piece has never been tinkered with, never been adjusted. That would be unthinkable, because there's something perfect about its form. It flows; it has this sense of inevitability as the music moves along. The other thing to mention is that, yes, the tunes are gorgeous, but what makes them so is the harmony. Rachmaninov's harmony – his chromaticism, his way of using inner voices – is original. He's a great contrapuntalist, not in the sense of writing fugues like Bach, but as a harmonic contrapuntalist. His harmonies have this inner movement, this shifting, this undulation underneath the melody, which gives the melody its great power. When we sing tunes to ourselves the brain adds the harmony without us even realising it; and there are some tunes by Rachmaninov that without the harmony would be very boring and very dead. It's when you add that harmony that they become poignant.

The second movement is the great lyrical, melodic movement of the piece and you get a fine example of counterpoint within

the harmony in the way that the piano accompanies when the flute comes in with the melody. It's a texture for someone with big hands, because the stretches in Rachmaninov's music are often very large. He wrote for his own hands; and for many of us, whose hands are not as large as his were, there are moments when it's not comfortable to play. The beginning of the second movement is like that – stretching while also shaping underneath is a challenge. If you stretch your hand out as wide as possible, the tendons are tight and you'll have less control of your muscles.

SPOT-ON PSYCHOLOGY

In all four concertos, the beginning of the last movement has some of the most difficult music. The first time that theme appears in the piano in the triplets, it's very awkwardly written. You also have this idea of a 'big tune'. It doesn't happen just once – we hear it three times. After the opening section in the *scherzando* mood that Rachmaninov does so wonderfully, he presents us with this gorgeous melody. It's all a long way from the home key of C minor. That sets us up for the coda, which builds up and up, and there's a cadenza with the tune we've heard twice before. The orchestra plays it with full force and the piano accompanies with chords. The psychology is so right. It's like when a great writer tells you who did the crime at the very point that you want to know – the calculation is just perfect.

The piece starts and it's like you're warming up – you're testing the piano with these rich, wonderful chords

Even though Rachmaninov went on to write more modern works such as the *Symphonic Dances* and the *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini*, underneath it all there's a 19th-century aesthetic. He's part of that Russian pre-revolutionary way of thinking about the world. He was an unashamed aristocrat, really. His music was put down by intellectuals and musicologists in the 1960s and '70s who were infected with this idea of getting rid of the old world. This piece was a more-or-less annual mainstay at the Proms until the 1960s, but it was played just once between 1968 and 1987. Then, gradually, it began to be deemed great again, largely thanks to recordings. It turned a corner, and somehow a new generation of musicologists came along who started to look objectively at this music and realised that, actually, not only is it attractive, but it's extremely well written too. Rachmaninov was a great craftsman, a great composer – one could say one of the most influential composers of the 20th century, because what became film music emerged from two sources, in terms of orchestral music: Rachmaninov, and Holst's *The Planets*. Between those styles you have most of what we think of as the great film music of the past century.

Rachmaninov's music is for listeners of all ages. The wonderful thing about classical music in general (and this is something that we should market more) is that it's completely ageless. It is for people with a mind and a heart, whatever age they are. It's potentially a very equalising force, and I think it's sad that classical music has come to be seen as socially divisive, something for the middle classes, when really it's for everyone. This is the message we should be conveying to people. It's not easy to listen to. It doesn't just wash over you. It is really a challenge – but it's for everyone with a bit of passion.

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Ravel Piano Concerto in G

Pierre-Laurent Aimard

The Frenchman admires this showpiece – but being French isn't a prerequisite for playing Ravel

For me, this work is interesting if you look at it not as an isolated piece but as part of a pair of pieces, which is common for Ravel. There are two piano concertos that were conceived at the same time, and together they make a whole. It's just that they are the opposite of each other. One is essential, profound, historically very significant and very dramatic – and this is the Piano Concerto for the Left Hand (1929-30). The other is superficial and brilliant, a piece written more for the box office. Ravel, who was famous at this time, wanted to write a showpiece that he could take on a world tour. The result is the Piano Concerto in G (1929-31), which, because he was such an exceptional composer, is perfect.

This piece is more a divertimento than a concerto (Ravel originally thought of it as a divertimento), and it's extremely cleverly done. It incorporates all the fashions or clichés of the era (the 1920s and the start of the '30s): you have the jars, the mechanical moments, the neo-classicism. Even then, though, Ravel wrote it so finely that it is a very personal thing – touching and remarkably written.

I find the structure of the first movement uninteresting and conventional, but there are a lot of musical references in this concerto. We clearly hear those about which the composer himself spoke: Mozart, which we see in the second movement; and Saint-Saëns, which is not, in my opinion, the most noble reference. Ravel chooses a Basque song at the start, and some blues, but it is the way in which he works with the material that is remarkable. Evidently he intended to compose a light piece. Gershwin, Stravinsky – of course, they are influences, but in the end what is striking is how Ravel remains true to himself in terms of achievement, perfection of craftsmanship, elegance and sonorities. The mix of luxurious colour and transparency is extraordinary.

A GUIDING HAND

I have never played this piece without a conductor. I know that Leonard Bernstein did, that this was his showpiece, but for it to be really well played it's much better to have a conductor. For instance, it's not that straightforward – especially in the third movement – to play rhythmically. It's extremely virtuosic for many of the orchestral players too, so it's good to have a strong



guiding hand behind it. Bernstein was a showman, and I don't think his is the best example of what's been done with this concerto.

I had the privilege of recording this concerto with Pierre Boulez (who was in his eighties) and the best 'French' orchestra, the Cleveland. It didn't require much rehearsal, because both Boulez and the orchestra – being the masters that they were – could quickly get the dream result. My feeling about this recording is that it was very easy. Of course it required skill but it was a natural process. There were no sessions, only live recordings. There was just one patch session for each concerto, and these were used only for the final chords because of the applause, and for one or two other places because of coughs. It was one of Boulez's last recordings.

THE FRENCH TOUCH

I have played the piece in concert a lot, because just as the world believes that when you buy spaghetti it should always be Italian, so it believes that if you are a French pianist you should play Ravel concertos. In the case of the former, it is quite true – but I'm not so sure that it's true that a Ravel concerto requires a French pianist. It's a short piece and a light piece. It's a nice thing to do, but I have often thought, 'Why cross an ocean to play for 20 minutes?' Also, it's not a very hard piece, to be honest. If you want to play it well, in the right style, you need skill – that's another matter; but technically speaking, it's really easy and everybody can play it. It's more difficult for the orchestra than for the pianist. The Concerto for the Left Hand, however, is a very demanding work – that's a tough concerto. That's Ravel's big one.

When Ravel wished to compose a concerto, he was never short of ideas; but he came from a generation who wanted to get rid of the Romanticists, the piano concerto being one of their signatures. There were post-Romantic composers, Russians for instance, who played the 19th-century card constantly, but others just wanted to create something else, to turn the page. Stravinsky composed the Concerto for Piano and Wind Instruments, and then Bartók, Ravel and others realised that they could create things that belonged to their era rather than to the previous one. They realised that it was possible to renew the form in order to avoid sentimentalism, nostalgia and pompous gestures.

Schumann Piano Concerto

Ingrid Fliter

The Argentinian pianist is swept away by the poetry of this 'story of passion and abandon'

One of my first encounters with Schumann's music was when I was quite young. I remember having an LP of a mysterious 'Wymah Cohata' by 'Bepmah'. Back then I didn't know what it meant. It turned out to be a fabulous recording of a Schumann Piano Sonata by Lazar Berman (the record sleeve was written in Cyrillic). I recall having an instantaneous emotional attraction towards this sorrowful yet vibrant music.

DISCOVERING THE POETRY

During my first decade of studies, I learnt Schumann's *Kinderszenen*, Piano Sonata No 2 in G minor, *Etudes symphoniques*, *Phantasiestücke* and Intermezzos. But it was later, in my early twenties, when I discovered the Lieder, that I fell completely in love with Schumann. Through Fischer-Dieskau's recordings of *Myrten*, *Liederkreis* and *Dichterliebe* and Christa Ludwig's *Frauenliebe und -leben*, I was thrown irremediably into this poetic and complex world of kaleidoscopic human emotions and poignant truths. 'Nun hast du mir den ersten Schmerz getan' ('Now for the first time you have given me pain', from *Frauenliebe und -leben*) is an example of those painful revelations. The relationship between the text and the music, the harmonic tensions, the radiance of happiness, the darkness of pain...all these elements blended into this music and made me feel part of an integrated world of beauty and reconciliation.

Schumann's inner life was that of a poet, and as such he dreamt of a perfect world that not only doesn't exist, but will never exist, which makes it all the more tragic. Schumann was also captivated by the idealism and innocence of childhood, which he tried to represent through *Kinderszenen*. The last two pieces in this set are 'Child falling asleep' and 'The poet speaks'; it was Schumann's way of showing the connection between the two, the poet representing the child in its natural state. While Schumann's soul was fragile, his inner will was extremely strong – he understood his responsibility towards art, and fought against all obstacles with exemplary courage. It is our duty to make his music as comprehensible as possible. He needs us to prove wrong anyone who thinks his music was created by a perturbed mind. In a world of increasing cynicism, his purity of soul comes to protect us from destructive forces, so, just as we need to preserve forests to obtain oxygen for living, we also need to save Schumann to keep our innocence alive. Although I don't believe his

music speaks to everyone, I'm sure that where it does it touches the inner soul and transforms that person's existence.

A LOVE STORY

The Piano Concerto is one of my favourite pieces by Schumann. It's a chant of love and warmth, a story of passion and abandon, an ocean of emotions in which one voluntarily lives, breathes and loves. He wrote the first movement, *Allegro affettuoso*, with his muse, Clara, in mind. As in many other works, his obsession with her is clear. He takes letters from her name, C and A, and creates with these notes an affable and expectant theme. The shape of this theme, with its descending and ascending movement, creates a sort of anticipation, a feeling of excitement about his love for her. For me, nothing in this theme is either self-indulgent or abated. Schumann's heart is trembling, fresh and hopeful. The name Clara comes back in the development in a sort of call: 'Clara! Clara!' in a progression of descending sevenths. The middle episode, a heart-warming dialogue between piano and clarinet, is one of the peaks of beauty in this movement. The cadenza struggles to find a way out of the labyrinth, resolving in a frantic coda that brings the movement to a breathtaking close.

The second movement is an opportunity to enjoy a beautiful interaction between the orchestra and the piano; it's a delicious chamber music moment. And the last movement is a happy dance, a celebration of life! Metric and rhythmic ambiguities colour the optimistic spirit that swells to exuberant triumph.

SPONTANEOUS CREATIVITY

My experience of recording this piece was blazing and buoyant. As an interpreter, one is challenged continuously by

Schumann's music. The sudden changes of mood demand an extremely active and spontaneous approach, as one explores at the same time the idea of freshness and playfulness which Schumann also liked to inhabit. His music should sound as if it were happening in that very moment, giving the interpreter a fundamental role in the creative process.

My relationship with the Scottish Chamber Orchestra started a few years ago, and it has been deeply satisfying and gratifying. These musicians' quality of sound, their flexibility and ability to connect – emotionally, musically and structurally – were everything a pianist could want, and they made me feel supported and embraced in the best way possible.



Shostakovich Piano Concerto No 2

Alexander Melnikov

It may seem straightforward, says the Russian pianist, but Shostakovich's Second is anything but

For me, the two piano concertos are not the most important music by Shostakovich. Those would probably be some of the quartets and Symphony No 14 – and even they are less important than the Second Violin Concerto and the Second Cello Concerto. On the surface, the First Piano Concerto (1933) has more stylistic variety, with its direct quotations from Bach, Handel and Rachmaninov – so it seems more diversified than the Second; but actually, it is more straightforward. It's not better or worse, it's just different.

The Second Piano Concerto (1957) is interesting because it's supposed to be a student piece (written for Shostakovich's son, Maxim), so not too hard, but when I was learning it I found it very difficult technically, especially the last movement – much more difficult than anything in the First Piano Concerto. It's a very popular piece, but for the wrong reasons. It's not its fault, though. Around the time I was playing the piece and recording it, I had a CAT scan (I have a back problem) whereby you have to go into this tube that makes a lot of noise, so they give you music to listen to; I had the second movement of this concerto, and I became convinced that it was a very good piece of music.

A CHANGE OF HEART

I was talked into playing this piece by the conductor Teodor Currentzis, and it's true that, initially, before I took a closer look, I hadn't thought of it as a very significant piece within the composer's output. But I changed my mind completely once I started exploring it. For me, it's more important than the First Concerto. I think Shostakovich's message to us is, 'Listen to my music. If you find something there I'm not going to object to it.' The music says it all, and Shostakovich left it up to the listener to be the judge. I absolutely hate it when people feel the need to mention that he was a Communist. There's so much in his music and I respect the way that he didn't feel he had to put anything into words – I think it makes for a more enriching experience. He himself was religious about not giving out information regarding his music, but then he became popular – ironically, especially in the West – thanks to Solomon Volkov's book (*Testimony: The Memoirs of Dmitri Shostakovich*, 1979), which is largely a fabrication. That's exactly what Shostakovich didn't want.



APPEARANCES CAN BE DECEPTIVE

I believe that Shostakovich deliberately wanted nothing to be quite what it seems in this concerto. On the surface it's just a happy, merry-go-round sort of piece, with a lyrical slow movement and a motoric last movement – but it's full of very strange occurrences. In the first movement, at the end of the cadenza and into the recapitulation, there's suddenly this incredible glimpse into very dark territory – into 'normal' Shostakovich dark territory, so to speak; and it deals with death. I remember that when I learnt it, it was from this point that I began to unwind the concept of the piece.

Being original for the sake of it is the worst thing in music, but I remember I kept finding those little indications by the composer in the score that say, 'No, it's not what you think it is'; and I played it from this point of view. I wasn't looking for anything, I just studied it and it was there. It was obvious to me. In all three movements there are moments when I think he is sending that same message.

This piece appears to be happy, but there are lots of spots which are less than happy. I talk like this because I think that this aspect largely gets overlooked. For me, the piece is extremely masterfully

written, and I think that its merits lie within the territory which, for most people, is inaccessible.

FINDING THE HONESTY

If you want to give an honest performance of this concerto in a big hall with an orchestra, then good luck. Even legends such as John Ogdon didn't manage to do that. It's hard. It should be easy, but there are a couple of things that, while not exactly unplayable in the way that Schumann or Stravinsky can be, are just extremely difficult to play. Some people feel the piece is deliberately reminiscent of Beethoven's *Emperor* Concerto, but I would not speculate – I don't know. Maybe it is, maybe it's not. Yes, it has the descending scale and *pianissimo*, but that is a pretty common occurrence in Western classical music.

When performing Shostakovich, once you've decided the general aesthetic direction you are taking, the corridor he gives you for interpretative freedoms is narrow. When I recorded the concerto with Currentzis we worked so hard on single notes and decisions. I'm indebted to this conductor – he opened my eyes to the piece and I owe it all to him. I'd call him a genius.

Tchaikovsky Piano Concerto No 1

Yevgeny Sudbin

Aiming for lyricism, not aggression, is the key to conquering Tchaikovsky's Concerto, says Sudbin

When I came to record Tchaikovsky's B flat minor Piano Concerto, I was worried that there were already more than 200 recordings available and that perhaps 400 recordings in total had been made. That put me off at first, but when I do play such a piece I try to find fresh insights or new perspectives. It's sometimes very hard to play a piece like this in a way that's refreshing, especially because the orchestra has also played it numerous times. You get to the rehearsal and they can sound very tired already. That's definitely a danger.

So the main challenge is successfully to breathe new life into the work. I perceive the piece to be more 'Classical' than Romantic – I'm not a big fan of Romantic performances of it. I think the structure has to be very clear, and that, with Tchaikovsky, the simpler the music, the better it is to play it in a more straightforward way, with not too much *rubato* and quite brisk tempos. It really doesn't suit the piece to have it played in a very Romantic way. The phrasing is straightforward and you can do a lot with texture, dynamics and decoration without having to change the tempos much.

LESS IS MORE

At the beginning, the chords should be played as spread arpeggios, implying a lyrical start to the piece, whereas nowadays a lot of pianists play it in a very bombastic way, as though they were dropping bombs. It's meant to be broad, not in terms of tempo but melodically – it should be lyrical rather than aggressive. I think Tchaikovsky wrote them to be entirely broken and arpeggiated chords. In my recording with the São Paulo Symphony Orchestra under John Neschling, I break them up a little bit but not entirely. Interestingly, the theme from the beginning doesn't really come back again, which is unusual. So I guess, from that perspective, it's not a very conventional piece, but then again there were a lot of other concertos written at that time which didn't really conform to the traditional structure of a typical piano concerto.

The second movement is quite amazing from the point of view of colour, but the whole of the middle section can, if not played in the right way, sound like a technical exercise. The movement is impressionistic in the French way, with shapes that are not really that clear; I think it is more about colour than about beautiful, clear melodies, of which you have

more in the first movement. The flute theme has been the subject of controversy, but otherwise the movement is in ABA form.

I remember listening to recordings of this piece a lot when I was four or five years old and being really fascinated by the whole thing and the last movement in particular. It was a recording of it by Gilels that made me want to play the piano when I was a child. I found it so amazing. Tchaikovsky lays himself bare, and when a composer does that it's hard for a performer. Sometimes it's easier when a composer tries to conceal what he's trying to say, but here that's not the case: the emotion is almost too 'in your face', but you have to interpret it – there's nowhere to hide emotionally.

PRECISION MATTERS

There's a clear structure to this work; the tempos have to be very precise and the fireworks have to happen. Tchaikovsky did, however, make a lot of revisions that deviated from the first version in which (I think) some of the octaves were rewritten. There are places where, even if an orchestra has played it many times, it can still be incredibly tricky – especially the scales on the piano in the last movement, where it never seems to be together. In a recording you can hear

when something comes apart much more clearly than in a concert, so we had to spend a lot of extra time trying to fix that passage. Consider the way in which the tempo changes happen: there are many instances when the music gets faster abruptly; this is the hard part because there's not enough time to think and see which tempo the orchestra's going to take – you have to get it right from the very first note.

In attempting to make this piece sound fresh, I think some performers' approach is to try to make it too interesting or too unusual, resulting in something that sounds idiosyncratic. But with this kind of music, which is quite emotional and bare, it helps to go back to the basics, to try to play more or less what's written and pretend that there aren't so many recordings. The music can renew itself. That's the way I approached it and that's how I would advise other people to approach it. When performers try something radically different, maybe one result in a hundred can turn out to be amazing – but there's the danger that it will sound dishonest or overthought, or simply as if the pianist isn't being faithful to the music. 

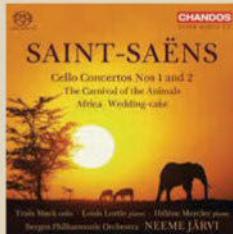


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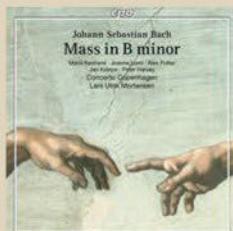
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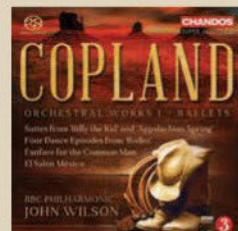
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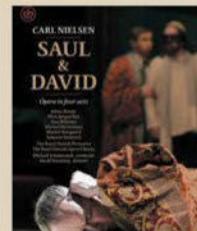
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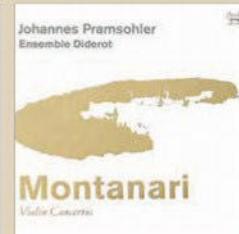
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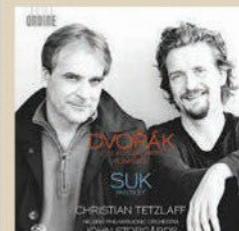
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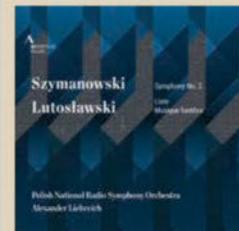
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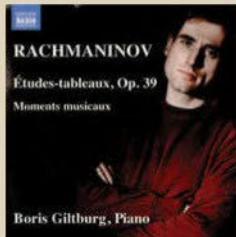


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Naxos

This highly gifted pianist's well-chosen survey of Rachmaninov's solo works reveals a remarkable instinct for getting to the heart of the composer's music, and then making it his own.

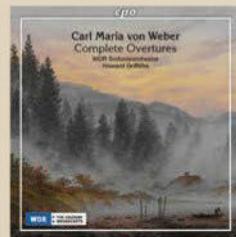
► REVIEWED IN JUNE 2016



DUFAY
'Les Messes à teneur'
Cut Circle / Jesse Rodin
Musique en Wallonie

Some very fine performances of these significant works from Dufay's last two decades: eight singers, all on impeccable form, make for a lively, intimate and focused experience.

► REVIEWED IN JULY 2016

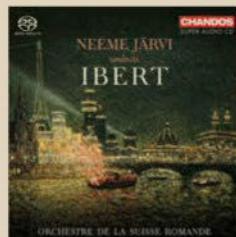


WEBER
Complete Overtures
WDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne / Howard Griffiths
CPO

Howard Griffiths and his players

bring a thrilling sense of character, clarity and colour to these Weber overtures – a hugely enjoyable listen.

► REVIEWED IN APRIL 2016



IBERT Orchestral Works
Suisse Romande Orchestra / Neeme Järvi
Chandos
Neeme Järvi and his excellent

players offer us elegant performances of the French composer's two best-known works, along with lesser-known pieces all adding a rich sense of context.

► REVIEWED IN MAY 2016



KHACHATURIAN. TCHAIKOVSKY
Piano Concertos
Xiayin Wang *pf*
RSNO / Peter Oundjian
Chandos

Another super

Chandos disc from pianist Xiayin Wang, who in both works is, argues critic Jeremy Nicholas, 'up with the very best'. High praise indeed!

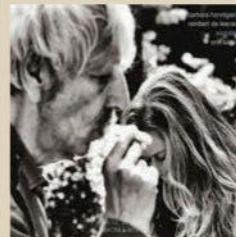
► REVIEWED IN MAY 2016



GRIEG. TCHAIKOVSKY
Piano Concertos
Denis Kozhukhin *pf*
Berlin RSO / Vassily Sinaisky
Pentatone

A concerto debut disc pairing such major works? Bold, but entirely justified by two superb performances from this Queen Elisabeth Competition first prize winner.

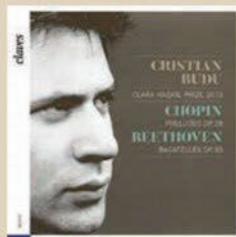
► REVIEWED IN MAY 2016



SATIE Socrate. Mélodies
Barbara Hannigan *sop*
Reinbert de Leeuw *pf*
Winter & Winter Songs which seem tailor-

made for Barbara Hannigan's skill at making controlled coolness seem rich and dramatic, with equally superb piano support from Reinbert de Leeuw.

► REVIEWED IN JUNE 2016



CHOPIN Preludes
BEETHOVEN
Bagatelles
Cristian Budu *pf*
Claves

In both the Chopin Preludes and the Beethoven Op 33 Bagatelles, Cristian Budu – a winner of the Clara Haskil competition – proves himself a master of the miniature in an impressive debut disc.

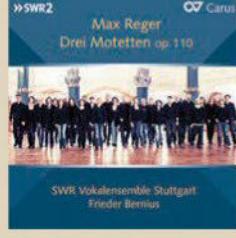
► REVIEWED IN JULY 2016



DVD/BLU-RAY
PUCCINI *La rondine*
Sols incl Alieva & Castronovo;
Deutsche Oper Berlin / Roberto Rizzi Brignoli
Delos

One of Puccini's less celebrated operas, *La rondine* is here given a stylish production – directed by tenor Rolando Villazón no less – to try to win over the work's critics.

► REVIEWED IN JULY 2016



REGER Drei Motetten
SWR Vocal Ensemble, Stuttgart / Frieder Bernius
Carus

to use the composer's anniversary year to highlight the diversity and beauty of his music; this disc is a superb contribution to that end.

► REVIEWED IN JULY 2016

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GRAMOPHONE

RECORDING OF THE MONTH

Richard Bratby welcomes the complete quartets by a Polish composer whose works are worthy to stand alongside the cycles of Tippett, Britten, Shostakovich and Bartók



Grażyna Bacewicz

Complete String Quartets

Silesian Quartet

Chandos ① ② CHAN10904 (133' • DDD)

This is a good time to be rediscovering post-war string quartets. The Heath Quartet's recent Wigmore Hall Tippett set (3/16) has prompted an overdue reassessment of a remarkable body of work; now, hot on the heels of the Lutosławski Quartet's survey on Naxos, we have another new complete Grażyna Bacewicz quartet cycle from the Katowice-based Silesian String Quartet. And if you've ever felt that Tippett's quartets form a sort of alternative biography of their composer, the same is doubly true for Bacewicz. These seven works, composed between 1938 and 1965, add up to a compelling portrait of a powerfully original creative spirit.

Those were turbulent years in Poland. Adrian Thompson's booklet-notes outline the story, and one of the most distinctive and appealing aspects of Bacewicz's art is the way her quartets seem to have served her as – well, not an escape, exactly, although it's extraordinary how one of the lightest and most outwardly carefree of the quartets, the Second, dates from 1943. And how little attention, too, she pays to the demands of Soviet artistic dogma in the post-war period. The quartets are more like an affirmation of art as art: of music's autonomy to speak in its own voice and no other, in an evolving language that combines intense emotion, boundless imagination and thrilling formal mastery.

That's one particular benefit of this set. Unlike Naxos, and an earlier cycle from the Amar Corde Quartet on the Polish label Acte



The assurance, insight and finish of this set of Bacewicz's seven string quartets make it feel like a landmark

Préalable, Chandos presents the quartets in chronological order, and there's no better path into Bacewicz's sound world. Take that path, and it's difficult not to be convinced that these works constitute an achievement worthy to stand alongside



Grażyna Bacewicz: a powerfully original creative spirit

the quartet cycles of Tippett, Britten, Shostakovich and Bartók. The first two quartets are buoyantly neo-classical (the First actually quotes a Lithuanian folksong), vibrant with Bacewicz's playful rhythmic sense and a violinist's instinct for string sonority. There are sudden sweeps, dancing finales and moments of glacial stillness.

By the Second Quartet, Bacewicz's fingerprints (sighing glissandos, haunted rocking motifs in the middle distance of a slow movement) are already emerging. By the propulsive, exuberant Third and Fourth we're dealing with mastery. Modernist colours – percussive pizzicato, metallic shivers – fill a taut classical form in the Fifth; and in the opening slides and sighs of the Sixth Quartet (1960 – Bacewicz's first venture into the twelve-note system) her voice (like Stravinsky's) is so distinctive that you don't hear tone rows: you hear Bacewicz. The Seventh Quartet (1965) unites fantastic, mercurial contrasts of mood in a form so cogent that the closest parallel I can think of is Haydn – and you can't give higher praise than that.

In short, Bacewicz's quartets are essential listening, and the Silesian Quartet really give the impression of having lived with them. They approach the cycle as a unity – as early as the First Quartet, they're colouring accompaniment figures to anticipate the *sul ponticello* buzzings of the later works – and everything grows out of a deep sense of Bacewicz's structures: listen to the sheer momentum they generate in the opening bars of the First, Third and Fifth Quartets. There's an objectivity and a sense of musical intelligence here that (I feel) serves the music better than the more red-in-tooth-and-claw Lutosławskis (Naxos's sound, too, is on the



The Silesian Quartet: playing Bacewicz like it's Beethoven

boomy side). Chandos captures the Silesian Quartet in a lucid, atmospheric recorded sound that's gutsy without being hectoring.

Not that there's anything cold-blooded about their playing; their range spans from melting tenderness in the first movement of the Fourth (the most openly romantic) to the fire-and-ice concentration of the third movement of the Fifth – one of several Bacewicz slow movements that seem to thaw slowly from within. The viola is often the bearer of Bacewicz's most intimate confessions, and the Silesian Quartet's viola player Łukasz Syrnicki is capable both of flute-like softness and ardent declamation. But the whole group seem to understand this life-affirming music from the inside. Even their comic timing is spot on – vital in Bacewicz's witty, high-voltage finales.

With at least three recorded cycles, Bacewicz's quartets haven't been as badly served as some and it's wonderful to have the choice of two very different recent recordings. Nonetheless, the assurance, insight and finish of this particular set make it feel like a landmark – an assertion of this music's place at the heart of the 20th-century quartet repertoire, where it surely belongs. The Silesian Quartet play it like it's Beethoven. There's no point-making, just a shared commitment to letting Bacewicz speak. And that's something profoundly worth hearing. **G**

String Quartets Nos 1, 3, 6 & 7 – selected comparison:

Lutosławski Qt (NAXO) 8 572806

String Quartets Nos 2, 4 & 5 – selected comparison:

Lutosławski Qt (NAXO) 8 572807

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Editor's Choice

Martin Cullingford's pick of the finest recordings reviewed in this issue

Orchestral



Mark Pullinger on Benedetti's Glazunov and Shostakovich:

'Chalk and cheese – or more aptly sweet and sour – is the flavour of this pairing on Nicola Benedetti's new album' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 37**



Hugo Shirley listens to a new disc of Strauss and Zemlinsky:

'It maybe seems a bit unfair to pit Strauss's brilliant *Till Eulenspiegel* against *Die Seejungfrau*' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 47**

Adler

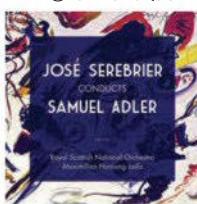
Symphony No 6. Cello Concerto^a.

Drifting on Winds and Currents

Maximilian Hornung VC

Royal Scottish National Orchestra / José Serebrier

Linn (F) CKD545 (58' • DDD)



Samuel Adler (b1928) is a very American symphonist. He approaches the form, and orchestral writing in general, with a taut energy, a bright palette, a penchant for neoclassical leanness paired with big-brush post-Romanticism and blurs of machine-age modernity. Think Rachmaninov spin-off, with car horns. He was born in Mannheim but his family emigrated to the United States in 1939, and it would be tricky to pinpoint the three works on this disc as the product of any particular decade because no particular school or trend or 'ism' applies. It's music that feels both untethered and unremarkable.

Adler wrote his Sixth Symphony in the mid-1980s but when the RSNO made this recording in 2015 it was the first time the score had ever been performed. (It had been commissioned by the Baltimore Symphony under David Zinman but ended up never being scheduled into a Baltimore season.) I doubt whether the piece will now become a Scottish season fixture, either, but the orchestra play it well. One area of repertoire that current music director Peter Oundjian has developed during his tenure at the RSNO is mid- to late-20th-century American music, and on this recording conductor José Serebrier brings out cleanly defined lines, pert wind solos and an old-fashioned thick American string sound that harks back to the symphony's dedicatee, Serge Koussevitzky. In the middle movement ('Slowly and very expressively') there are hints of that expectant string shimmer you get from classic Boston or New York recordings of Barber or American-period Bartók.

Adler's Cello Concerto is also a product of the 1980s, written for Christoph von

Dohnányi and Stephen Geber (then principal cellist of the Cleveland Orchestra) with orchestral language similar to that of the symphony, if more overtly jazzy – including an ill-advised lapse into a very classical-does-jazz drum-kit swing in the second movement. But Maximilian Hornung embraces the generous, extrovert solo writing and there's an attractive heft to his sound, with the right kind of gung-ho attack. The last work on the disc is a nine-minute tone-poem called *Drifting on Winds and Currents*, and if at first it sounds much as the title suggests – lush, floaty, reflective – it soon breaks into brass fanfares and rousing violin themes that find the RSNO in boisterous form. Worth mentioning, too, that the sound quality is very good, which bodes well: this was one of the first recordings made at the new RSNO Centre in Glasgow, which opened last year.

Kate Molleson

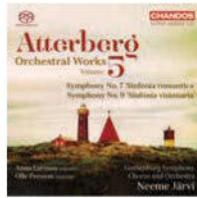
Atterberg

'Orchestral Works, Vol 5'

Symphonies – No 7, 'Sinfonia romantica', Op 45; No 9, 'Sinfonia visionaria', Op 54^a

Anna Larsson mez^a Olle Persson bar Gothenburg Symphony Chorus and Orchestra / Neeme Järvi

Chandos (F) CHSA5166 (63' • DDD/DSD • T/t)



After the success/notoriety of his Sixth Symphony in 1928, only in 1941–42 did Atterberg return to the form. Much had changed: a global depression, a world war, the rise of the avant-garde – but not his style. The Seventh Symphony (rev 1972) is an 'opera-symphony', constructed from themes from the opera *Fanal*, set during the Peasants' War in 1525 like *Mathis der Maler*, but closer to Prokofiev's Third or Vaughan Williams's Fifth than the Hindemith or Henze's Fourth (from *King Stag*). It was originally in four movements, but Atterberg detached the *Vittorioso* finale as a separate piece (recorded on Vol 4, 4/16) in the 1960s. This left an effective and attractive tripartite

design, 'Drammatico' – 'Semplice' – 'Feroce', but, even in Järvi's vivid and vibrant account, it does not advance on the celebrated *Dollar Symphony*, No 6.

Atterberg remained a lifelong Romantic. In the mid-1950s he became marginalised as the music of the younger generation and Second Viennese School made ground. For his Ninth and final symphony, Atterberg turned to the apocalyptic Icelandic tale, the *Völuspá*, and a much earlier, set-aside project for a cantata. His only choral symphony, the *Sinfonia visionaria* (1955–56) is the *summa summarum* of his career: a beautifully crafted cantata-symphony, the product of a lifetime's experience. Never mind that it is deeply conservative, that he – as Hindemith was doing at the same time – wrily pilloried dodecaphony in its representation of evil: it is an utterance of subtlety and profundity.

Järvi and his Gothenburg forces produce exemplary performances, stronger in interpretative outline than their rivals and much more vividly recorded. Listen no further than the opening chord of No 9 to hear the depth of Chandos's sound and Torbjörn Samuelsson's superb engineering. Recommended. Guy Rickards

Symphony No 7 – comparative versions:

Frankfurt RSO, Rasilainen (7/05^a) (CPO) CPO777 118-2

Malmö PO, M Jurowski (2/99) (STER) CDS1026-2

Symphony No 9 – comparative version:

Sols, Frankfurt RSO, Rasilainen (4/03) (CPO)

CPO999 913-2; (7/05) (CPO) CPO777 118-2

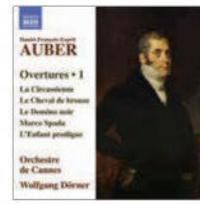
Auber

'Overtures, Vol 1'

Overtures to the operas *Le cheval de bronze*, *La circassienne*, *Les diamants de la couronne*, *Le domino noir*, *L'enfant prodigue*, *La fiancée*, *Fra Diavolo* and *Marco Spada*

Orchestre de Cannes / Wolfgang Dörner

Naxos (F) 8 573553 (64' • DDD)



Charm and elegance are the words that invariably come to mind when Auber is



Howard Griffiths and the Brandenburg State Orchestra, Frankfurt, complete their Brahms cycle on Klanglogo (review page 32)

mentioned, though there is, of course, much more to him than that. His operas were popular Europe-wide until the early 20th century and their overtures remained familiar concert items for many years thereafter. They're variable in quality and are sometimes dismissed simply as potpourris, hastily flung together. The first instalment of Naxos's survey, however, frequently reveals a more considered imagination at work.

There are some deft structures, of which the most elaborate is *Le domino noir*, a rondo with a theme and variations forming one of its episodes. Auber's orchestration combines depth with precision and clarity in ways that look forward to Meyerbeer and Offenbach. His melodic inspiration could be uneven, however, and he sometimes seems over-fastidious in his approach to the occasionally louche sensuality of his subjects – a cross-dressing Russian officer, for instance, in *La circassienne*, or the trainee abbess of *Le domino noir*, who has a penchant for attending masked balls in disguise.

The performances are uneven, too. Wolfgang Dörner and his Cannes orchestra are finely sensitive to detail, with the orientalist flourishes of *L'enfant prodigue* beautifully defined and the

complex string-writing at the start of *Fra Diavolo* delightfully poised. Elsewhere we could do with a bit more rhythmic fire, while the big Rossinian crescendos, of which Auber was fond, don't always have the requisite bite. The recordings were all made in the same Cannes hotel, though *La circassienne*, placed first on the disc, is for some reason more reverberant than the rest, where the sound is admirably clear.

Tim Ashley

CPE Bach • Hasse • Hertel

CPE Bach Cello Concerto, Wq170 H430

Hasse Cello Concerto in D

Hertel Cello Concertos – in A; in A minor

Musica Viva / Alexander Rudin VC

Chandos Chaconne (CHAN0813 (71' • DDD)



While we have the Italians to thank for first spotting the cello's potential as a solo instrument, by the middle decades of the 18th century composers in Germany were getting in on the act too. This recording sees Musica Viva, aka The Moscow Chamber Orchestra, present four early German cello concertos, with their

director Alexander Rudin doubling up as soloist. The central interest, and perhaps the real draw of the disc, is the premiere recording of two concertos by Johann Wilhelm Hertel. Hasse's Cello Concerto in D and CPE Bach's A major Cello Concerto form the bookends.

The concertos themselves are of the early-Classical heart-tugging variety, full of singing melodies, aching dissonances and winsome changes of mood. A notable feature of the two Hertel concertos is that their cadenzas are in the central slow movement rather than in the final *Allegro* – a Berlin School trick – and Rudin's beautifully sensitive, low-key approach to them is really delightful.

In fact the performances across the whole disc are all quiet stunners. Pitched at 415Hz, the orchestra offer up an immaculate, gently assured, light-of-touch period sound that seems all the more impressive given that this is by no means even their predominant stomping ground; you're just as likely to hear them in Handel, Glinka or contemporary repertoire. Rudin, meanwhile, is refreshing for his unshowiness, his lyrical and more virtuosic passages equally elegant, and the whole rich with subtly nuanced expression. A similar aesthetic has been applied to the

balance, Rudin placed in front of the orchestra but not dramatically so. All in all, a recording I'll be returning to.

Charlotte Gardner

Brahms

Symphonies - No 1, Op 68; No 2, Op 73

Brandenburg State Orchestra, Frankfurt /

Howard Griffiths

Klanglogo (KL1513 (80' • DDD)

Brahms

Symphonies - No 3, Op 90; No 4, Op 98

Brandenburg State Orchestra, Frankfurt /

Howard Griffiths

Klanglogo (KL1514 (72' • DDD)



Hard on the heels of *Conducting the Brahms Symphonies: from Brahms to Boult*, the late Christopher Dyment's study of the influence of conductor Fritz Steinbach on 20th-century Brahms interpretation which I reviewed in these columns in April, comes the conclusion of a Brahms cycle that draws on that very thing (the discs of Symphonies Nos 1 and 2 was released last year).

Since Steinbach left no recordings and since none of his conducting scores or marked parts has survived, it's a subject which has long struck me as being more interesting in theory than in practice. All that does survive are the notes of a little-known Kapellmeister, Walter Blume, typed up shortly before his death in 1933 under the title *Brahms in der Meiningen Tradition*, which have recently been republished. Even Dyment conceded that these are problematic, though in his 60-page penultimate chapter, he tested out the 'validity' of Blume's notes against a select group of Brahms recordings by notable conductors from the past. Curiously, Klemperer, who studied with Wilhelm Berger, Steinbach's successor in Meiningen in 1903, and who arrived in Cologne in 1917 to work with an orchestra whose leadership Steinbach had only recently vacated, was not one of them.

The present performances are based on a study of Blume's notes by Howard Griffiths, the 65-year-old English-born Swiss-based chief conductor of the Brandenburg State Orchestra, Frankfurt. Given that simply registering the Brahms symphonies on the orchestra is a daunting enough project, adding in Blume's

complex annotations would appear to be a somewhat Sisyphean, not to say potentially redundant task.

Take the opening of the Third Symphony. Though it's possible to find quite a close correlation here between Blume's Steinbach memories and what Steinbach witnesses Adrian Boult and Arturo Toscanini do in their extant recordings, the Frankfurt orchestra's touch is rather less precise where pertinent but difficult-to-register detail is concerned.

Were the Brahms symphonies entirely made up of slow movements and intermezzos, the new performances might score well. What is missing, I find, is any sense of the scale and dramatic reach of the big outer movements. When Steinbach conducted a Brahms cycle in London in 1902, it was reported that the music was 'rendered with such life and impulse, with such a spirit of romance, that one felt their power in a quite unaccustomed degree'. The spirit of romance is certainly present in Griffiths's readings but it's too often at the expense of other things besides.

The Frankfurt orchestra produces a very agreeable soft-grained legato sound but the saxophone-like horns, once the bane of so much Soviet and Eastern European Brahms, are an unexpected fly in the ointment. **Richard Osborne**

Bruckner

Symphony No 5 (ed Nowak, 1878)

London Philharmonic Orchestra /

Stanisław Skrowaczewski

LPO (LPO0090 (79' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Royal Festival Hall, London, October 31, 2015



This concert recording of Bruckner's Fifth Symphony follows on from the LPO's previous releases of the Third and Seventh symphonies under the same conductor. Skrowaczewski, who had just turned 92 at the time of this performance, not only conducted from memory but also stood for the entirety of the symphony, a fact that no doubt helps account for the rapturous applause heard at the end. However, the applause also reflects the fact that the audience had just heard a performance of exceptional insight and concentration.

Skrowaczewski is at his finest in the score's more introspective sections, such as the second subject of the first movement and much of the *Adagio*. The passage for woodwinds from bar 139 (12'04") of the latter is exquisitely rendered, particularly

by solo flute. Indeed, the playing of the orchestra is first-class throughout, with mellifluous strings and wonderfully phrased and blended brass. Also impressive is Skrowaczewski's grip on the work's architecture, tempi for each section chosen in the context of the needs of the immediate material as well as the longer-term unity of the work. As in his 1996 recording with the Saarbrücken Radio Symphony Orchestra (Oehms), Skrowaczewski ensures that the writing for flutes at bar 624 near the end of the finale is distinctly audible, a feature that some other conductors, notably Abbado, have also encouraged.

The Fifth Symphony is an extensively recorded work – this is the fourth version to have come my way in less than a year – and competition is fierce. Other versions, such as the recent release by Lance Friedel on MSR Classics, offer more intensity and grandeur at key points, particularly at the close of the symphony. This new LPO release nevertheless has its own virtues, especially in the *Adagio*, and is worth any Brucknerian's time. **Christian Hoskins**

Selected comparison:

LSO, Friedel (4/16) (MSR) MS1600

Butterworth

The Banks of Green Willow. Six Songs from 'A Shropshire Lad'^a. A Shropshire Lad - Rhapsody. Two English Idylls. Suite for String Quartette (orch Russman). Love Blows as the Wind Blows^a. Orchestral Fantasia (compl Russman)

^aJames Rutherford bar

BBC National Orchestra of Wales / Kriss Russman

BIS (BIS2195 (76' • DDD/DSD • T)



Even 100 years after his death on the Somme, it's still impossible not to feel the gap left by George Butterworth. Which of us, enchanted by *The Banks of Green Willow* or the *Shropshire Lad* songs, hasn't wondered 'what if'?

This disc offers one answer, with a completion by Kriss Russman of Butterworth's sketches for an orchestral Fantasia. It's not the first such completion, though where Martin Yates (Dutton, 5/16) extended Butterworth's 92-bar fragment to 16 minutes, Russman wisely confines it to just eight. Even so, less than half of the music is by Butterworth. Russman's guesswork is idiomatically scored but sounds, in the end, too much like a rewrite of the *Shropshire Lad* Rhapsody without adequate material.

You do have to wonder what the perfectionist Butterworth would have made of it – or of Russman's orchestral versions of his *Shropshire Lad* cycle. Again, the scoring is idiomatic and sensitive, and James Rutherford brings yards of rich mahogany tone. But it feels as if the music is being blown up to a scale that Butterworth never intended; and the same goes for Russman's string-orchestra version of the unpublished *Suite for String Quartette* (sic). A lilting performance can't quite cover the loss of intimacy – or the sense that Butterworth's ideas were never meant to bear this weight.

Still, it's impossible not to sympathise with Russman's motives, and his accounts of Butterworth's four completed orchestral works are fresh and passionate, with a wide dynamic range captured in crystal-clear BIS sound. And Rutherford gives an ardent reading of Butterworth's only orchestral song-cycle, *Love Blows as the Wind Blows*. Butterworth's admirers will want to hear this disc anyway, and that performance alone would provide ample justification.

Richard Bratby

Cerha

Nacht^a. Drei Orchesterstücke^b

^aSWR Symphony Orchestra, Baden-Baden and

Freiburg / Emilio Pomàrico; ^bWDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne / Jukka-Pekka Saraste
Kairos ⑤ 0015005KAI (64' • DDD)
Recorded live at the ^bPhilharmonie, Cologne,
February 7, 2014; ^aBaar-Sporthalle,
Donaueschingen, October 17, 2014



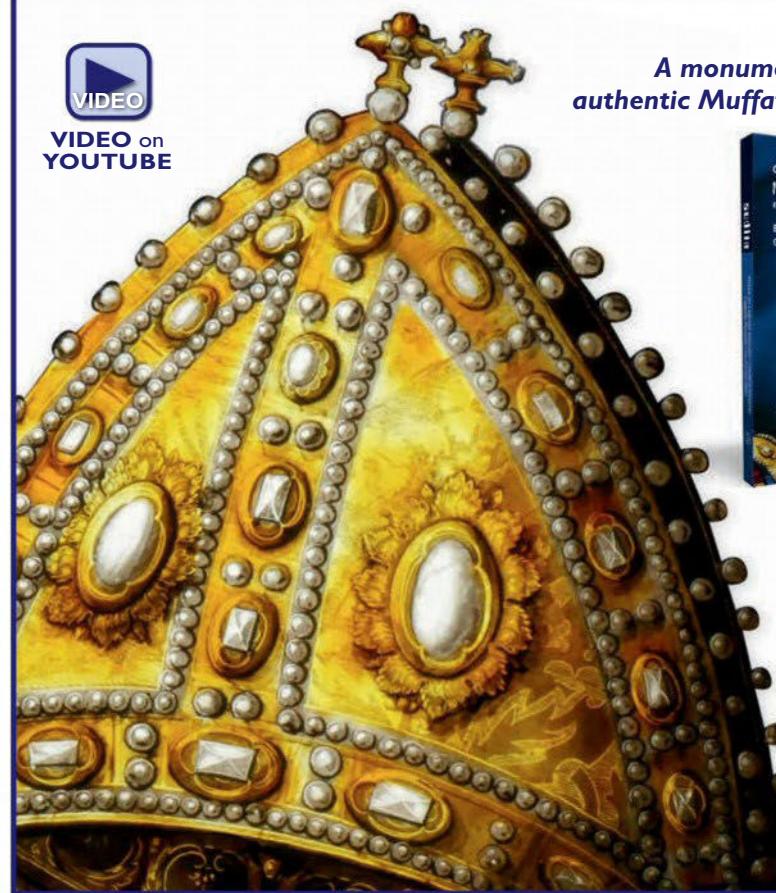
Although Kairos's rate of production has decreased in the past few years, the Viennese label still regularly releases discs of music by contemporary Austrian composers. This CD of two recent orchestral works by Friedrich Cerha, celebrating the composer's 90th birthday, is a welcome addition to Kairos's four previous albums of his music.

While Cerha's recent chamber music adheres to classical forms, his orchestral music from the same period eschews them, revisiting instead the principles laid out in his sound-mass works from the late 1950s such as *Spiegel*. Commissioned for the Donaueschingen Festival in 2014 (from which date this recording is taken), *Nacht* is a work of slow-building textures and beautiful sonorities. A night sky of harmonic stasis is periodically intruded upon by

meteor showers of glissandos shooting across the orchestra. The SWR Symphony Orchestra, Baden-Baden and Freiburg, is in fine form, from delicately tolling tubular bells via Bergian woodwind lyricism to immense brass chords.

The *Drei Orchesterstücke* (2006-11) show Cerha in pensive mood. Though intended, he says, 'to be nothing more than good music,' they appear on the contrary an act of retrospection over a life, from opening lullaby to closing intimations of mortality. In the 'Berceuse céleste' (2006), a texture of quiet string ostinatos gradually expands to admit an ambling brass motif, a curious, capricious figure that comes to trigger chaotic upsurges of sound. The ironically titled 'Intermezzo' (2010-11) is a long, loud, violent work full of wild polyphony. Though Cerha's knack for conjuring up ecstatic sounds as usual serves him well, at 20 minutes this central movement outstays its welcome. 'Tombeau', the closing movement, is a work of funereal shades, low strings and brass leading the way. Little happens other than a slow crescendo to a cacophonous *tutti* and a corresponding slow fade away; but, as often with Cerha, this intense darkness finds expression in wonderful orchestral colour, and the work has a stately grandeur. Liam Cagney

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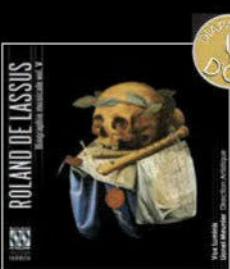
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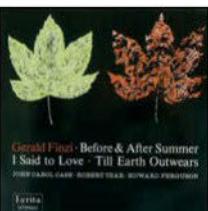
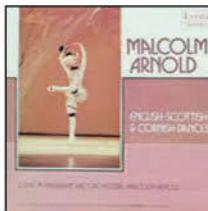
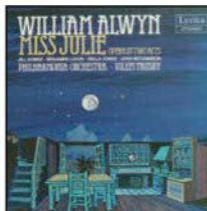
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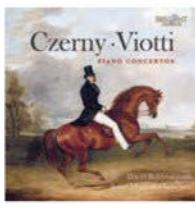


The Scottish Ensemble couple Debussy arrangements with works by Takemitsu on Linn

Czerny · Viotti

Czerny Piano Concerto No 1, Op 214^a. Concerto for Piano Four Hands, Op 153^b **Viotti** Concerto No 19, Wi19^c. Concerto No 3 for Violin and Piano, Wi9^d

David Boldrini, ^b**Elena Pinciaroli** *p/f* **Rami Musicali Orchestra** / ^{acd}**Massimo Belli**, ^d**Augusto Vismara** ^b*vn* Brilliant Classics \odot ② 94899 (119' • DDD)



This is the third time Czerny's A minor Piano Concerto has appeared in these pages in as many issues, if you count the reissue of Felicja Blumental's 1971 Turnabout recording included in the 40-disc box of Rare Romantic Concertos from Brilliant Classics (see my review on page 87). Harriet Smith did not think much of the recent account with soloist Rosemary Tuck (Naxos, 6/16), advising readers to save their money and wait for a forthcoming Hyperion release from Howard Shelley. Having listened to the present recording (from Brilliant Classics again, but made in 2014) I can only urge readers to heed that advice in this case too. After the lengthy opening *tutti*, the soloist enters gingerly before striking a *fortissimo*

octave C natural above the stave. It is rare that the sound of a piano makes me wince – but it did here. David Boldrini leaves you in no doubt that he is playing a percussion instrument. Nor that the work is in A minor. Nor that the piano has been placed at an uncomfortable distance from the orchestra, leaving it to operate in a different and glassy acoustic. Here, the concerto emerges as a string of technical studies with a rudimentary orchestral backdrop – and the work is better than that. Blumental, though more sprightly than Tuck, may not be quite as nimble as Boldrini but I prefer her Mozartian elegance and Turnabout's elderly sound any day. For the Czerny Four-Hand Concerto turn to the peerless Tal & Groethuysen for their 2014 account (Sony Classical).

Brilliant Classics' unlikely coupling, Viotti's Concerto in G minor, also appears, strangely, in their box-set (as CD 24, with Blumental as the soloist once more). This and the two-movement Concerto for violin and piano pre-date the Czerny by some 40 years, well-crafted, instantly forgettable, production-line stuff. The lengthy booklet (English only) will tell you all about them, though nothing about the soloist, conductor or the less-than-ideal orchestra. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Debussy · Takemitsu

Debussy String Quartet, Op 10 (arr Morton).

The Girl with the Flaxen Hair (arr C Matthews).

Jimbo's Lullaby (arr Manson) **Takemitsu** Black Rain – Funeral Music. José Torres – Music of Training and Rest. Nostalgia

Scottish Ensemble / Jonathan Morton *vn*

Linn \odot CKD512 (55' • DDD)



Tōru Takemitsu's *Nostalgia*, an elegy for the great Russian film maker Andrei

Tarkovsky, forms the memorable conclusion to this impressive new disc from the Scottish Ensemble. The more poignant for its restraint, this miniature concerto for violin and strings requires just the kind of subtly polished playing that Jonathan Morton and his team provide. The two other short movements that Takemitsu arranged from his film scores – 'Funeral Music' and 'Music of Training and Rest' – make a beguiling diptych, the first a deeply felt lament, the second a slice of jazzy comedy which is no less subtle in its way.

Restraint and understatement are also key to a pair of arrangements of Debussy piano pieces. James Manson plays double

bass and so takes special delight in the gruff opportunities available in 'Jimbo's Lullaby', while Colin Matthews relishes the challenge of defamiliarising the pianistic standard that is 'The Girl with the Flaxen Hair', dissolving the cool original into a warmly resonant haze (with a pair of harps joining the much-divided strings).

The most substantial piece is Jonathan Morton's arrangement of Debussy's String Quartet, increasing the number of players from four to 17 and making much of the kind of contrasts between solo and concerted playing that the original was designed to avoid. It might be even more effective to arrange the work for a more varied ensemble, including woodwind. But if it has to be strings only, it could hardly be better done, and certainly not better played or recorded than is the case here.

Arnold Whittall

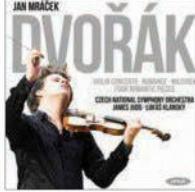
Dvořák

Violin Concerto, Op 53 B108^a. Romance, Op 11

B38^a. Mazurek, Op 49 B90^a. Four Romantic Pieces, Op 75 B150^b

Jan Mráček vn^b Lukáš Klánský pf^a Czech National Symphony Orchestra / James Judd

Onyx ® ONYX4160 (68' • DDD)



Reviewing Christian Tetzlaff's recording of the Concerto with the Helsinki Philharmonic

under John Storgårds I made reference to 'an exceptionally wide range of colours and nuances, from fragility to full-on passion', as well as the fact that Tetzlaff is very much his own man. Post-war recordings of this engaging work have tended to take on the influence of violinist Josef Suk, whose recorded performances are both stylistically distinctive and indelibly memorable. Jan Mráček definitely takes the Suk route, which is all well and good, save for some occasional mannerisms, such as the broadened descent for the second set at 3'21" and the affected rubato a minute or so later, which I would find difficult to take on repetition. Also James Judd's conducting is rather foursquare: too often you get the feeling that both Mráček and Judd are ploughing on regardless, going through the motions, so to speak, rather than enjoying the concerto's propensity to dance, which Tetzlaff and Storgårds manage seemingly without the least effort. The slow movement is lyrically turned and warmly phrased but, come the finale, and while the spirit is fairly genial, a feeling of flat-footedness returns.

Like Tetzlaff, Mráček adds the lovely Romance, though I prefer Tetzlaff's subtly

expressed approach and certainly prefer Storgårds's more delicate Helsinki accompaniment. Tetzlaff further treats us to Josef Suk's fiery Fantasy in G minor for violin and orchestra, whereas Mráček offers a lusty performance of the infrequently performed *Mazurek*, Op 49 – both violinist and conductor score maximum points here – then switches from an orchestral accompaniment to a duo partnership with pianist Lukáš Klánský for the *Four Romantic Pieces*, Op 75, the first of which is as seductive as anything Dvořák composed, the last a haunting *Larghetto*. Nothing to complain about in terms of either player until you consult Suk and Holeček (Supraphon) or James Ehnes with Eduard Laurel (Analekta) for comparisons, and then the inevitable dampener 'good but not that good' tends to bar a wholehearted recommendation. Generally good sound, with some lack of inner detail in the

Concerto. Rob Cowan

Violin Concerto, Romance – selected comparison:

Tetzlaff, Helsinki PO, Storgårds
(3/16) (OND1) ODE1279-5

Dvořák

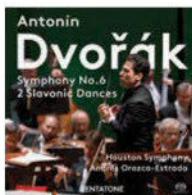
Symphony No 6, Op 60 B112. Slavonic

Dances – Op 46 B83 No 8; Op 72 B147 No 3

Houston Symphony Orchestra /

Andrés Orozco-Estrada

Pentatone (F) PTC5186 575 (52' • DDD/DSD)



You can't fault the Houston Symphony for consistency. Their March release of Dvorak's Seventh and Eighth Symphonies (5/16) was both big-hearted and boisterous, while verging on the brash. Their new recording of Dvorak's Sixth, also under Andrés Orozco-Estrada, is much the same, except that this piece can better withstand their wildest impulses.

After all, is there anything in Dvořák's symphonies more rambunctious than the third movement? In this orchestra's hands, it booms. So, too, does the joyously rustic finale, where the players aren't afraid to get their boots muddy. The pacing is never in question, nor is the sense of fluidity: here, the unravelling of the lilting *Allegro non tanto* sounds truly seamless. And overall there's a strong sense that Orozco-Estrada is less preoccupied with moment-to-moment detail than with flow and overarching structure.

Which has its downside. The string staccatos following the opening movement's introduction lack pinpoint precision. So do the transitions, not least between the Furiant

and the *Presto*. This offers nothing like the clarity of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra under Marin Alsop, nor the subtlety of the Lucerne Symphony Orchestra under James Gaffigan (for one thing, Orozco-Estrada would do well to go easier on the bass). It's not surprising, then, that the work's emotional centre – the *Adagio* – comes across as rather generic.

And it's no surprise, either, that the disc's two filler pieces – Dvořák's Slavonic Dances Op 72 No 3 and Op 46 No 8 – lack the crispness that should be a primary selling point. Yes, they're energetic enough. But, on the whole, this is a foggy rendition, too inclined to make up in volume what it lacks in rhythmic punch. **Hannah Nepil**

Symphony No 6 – selected comparisons:

Baltimore SO, Alsop (12/10) (NAXO) 8 570995

Lucerne SO, Gaffigan (4/14) (HARM) HMC90 2188

Eötvös

Violin Concerto No 2, 'DoReMi'^a. Cello

Concerto grosso^b. Speaking Drums^c

^aMidori vn^bJean-Guihen Queyras vc

^cMartin Grubinger perc Radio France

Philharmonic Orchestra / Peter Eötvös

Alpha ® ALPHA208 (71' • DDD)



Although his prominence among European composers has come about primarily through his operas, Peter Eötvös has been equally prolific in terms of concertos – with the three featured on this new release taking his tally up to a dozen. Earliest here is the *Cello Concerto grosso* (2011), its title underlining the role of the eight orchestral cellos as 'sounding board', within which solo cello plots an eventful course especially when the presence of Transylvanian dances imparts a vigorous and frequently aggressive quality. The work's three movements evolve their own formal logic as they progress. It's the same with those of *DoReMi* (2012), Eötvös's Second Violin Concerto. The title is a play on the name of the dedicatee Midori, but is also indicative of a motivic simplicity that underpins this music's skittish and often surreal progress (again over three movements) but reaches a suddenly pensive cadenza and poetic closing 'nightscape'.

Ostensibly more concrete, *Speaking Drums* (2013) is itself a virtuoso percussion concerto for Martin Grubinger. His instrumental agility is enhanced by vocal contributions that draw on poems by Sándor Weöres in a forthright 'Dance Song' and ominous 'Nonsens [sic] Songs', before the final Passacaglia similarly



Nicola Benedetti presents concertos by Glazunov and Shostakovich on her new disc for Decca

features texts by the 11th-century poet Jayadeva as it heads via a visceral cadenza-like workout towards its effervescent conclusion. All three performances, two from the artists for whom the pieces were written (Jean-Guihen Queyras substituting for Miklós Perényi), evince the combination of technical rigour and interpretative flair these works require in abundance; while the OPRF musicians play with alacrity under Eötvös's direction. Superbly recorded and decently annotated, this disc is recommended to admirers of and newcomers to a composer whose musical imagination knows few bounds.

Richard Whitehouse

Feldman

'Beckett Material'

Orchestra. *Elemental Procedures*^a.

Routine Investigations

^a**Claudia Barainky sop WDR ^bRadio Chorus and Symphony Orchestra, Cologne / Peter Rundel**

Wergo (F) WER7325-2 (44' • DDD)



If you're wondering, and this would be a perfectly reasonable point to raise, why an

album of Morton Feldman's music entitled 'Beckett Material' would have opted not to include his Beckett-based opera *Neither* nor his late-period ensemble piece *For Samuel Beckett*, answers lie in the convoluted history of Feldman's attempts to manoeuvre his compositional language into ever-closer union with the Beckettian aesthetic.

'Beckett Material' documents three rarely recorded works – *Orchestra*, *Elemental Procedures* and *Routine Investigations* – all written between April and July 1976 as mind-flexing exercises as Feldman was gearing up to compose *Neither*, for which Beckett would provide a tailor-made text. Sebastian Claren's booklet-notes posit the intriguing thought that the composer might have worked on all three works simultaneously. But even if the notion of all three scores open on his desk at the same time feels moderately implausible, the thrill for Feldman aficionados is hearing our man knead his language into malleable Beckettian dough: textures, harmonic anchors and melodic inflections that recur throughout these pieces in varied permutations and would spill into later pieces.

The WDR Sinfonieorchester Köln under Peter Rundel produce perfectly neat and serviceable performances but without

particularly moving beyond the level of putting notes in the right place. The premiere recording of *Orchestra* – with the Deutsches Symphonie-Orchester Berlin under Brad Lubman – was released on Mode in 2011 and manages to excavate a grander spectrum of dynamics and internal colour. Tracing drama through Feldman – especially explicitly Beckettian Feldman – can risk undermining his rhetoric-free zone, but by clearly delineating instrumental colour and behaviour Lubman massages the different strands into an elusively furtive theatre of sound. Yammering brass co-exist tetchily with airy, gliding strings – relationships that in Rundel's hands sound disappointingly vanilla.

Elemental Procedures, despite Claudia Barainky's poised vocal line, again feels clinical; but the sextet *Routine Investigations* punches above its chamber-sized weight, the clarity of line against line overriding the interpretative anonymity experienced elsewhere. **Philip Clark**

Glazunov • Shostakovich

Glazunov Violin Concerto, Op 82

Shostakovich Violin Concerto No 1, Op 99

Nicola Benedetti vn

Bournemouth Symphony Orchestra/Kirill Karabits

Decca  478 8758DH (59' • DDD)

Chalk and cheese – or more aptly sweet and sour – is the flavour of this Glazunov and Shostakovich concerto pairing on Nicola Benedetti's new album. Glazunov's Violin Concerto in A minor was created for Leopold Auer in 1905, before the Russian Revolution, while Shostakovich's First was composed for David Oistrakh in 1947 but not premiered until 1955, after Stalin's deadly shadow had lifted. They couldn't be more different. Glazunov's was possibly the most lyrical violin concerto to appear since Mendelssohn's and the Shostakovich inhabits a dark, bitter world. How far does Benedetti differentiate between them?

Her Shostakovich is impressive. Like Oistrakh on his recording with the Leningrad Philharmonic (under Mravinsky conducting), Benedetti is very forwardly placed so, for instance, we hear less of the gurgling bass clarinet and commentary in the Scherzo. She captures the bleak, crepuscular atmosphere of the long first-movement Nocturne – no moonlit romantic rendezvous here but a dark, dangerous place. The Scherzo is suitably grotesque, with plenty of aggressive, muscular bite to her playing, digging into Shostakovich's 'DSCH' musical monogram. Her Passacaglia is weighty, beautifully scaled down in the contemplative cadenza, while the Burlesque, although not quite as crazed as Lisa Batiashvili or Leonidas Kavakos, brings the concerto to a lively close. The superior sound balance on Kavakos's Mariinsky recording with Gergiev (the best of recent years, to my mind) ensures better integration of soloist with orchestra, the Mariinsky offering more idiomatic, sardonic support than the BSO under Kirill Karabits.

Glazunov's concerto was written at a time when the Belyayev circle, of which he was at the centre, was less concerned with the Russian nationalistic school of the Mighty Handful. It's a rhapsodic work for the most part, its two large-scale movements linked by a cadenza, the finale teeming with virtuoso pyrotechnics for the soloist – a chance to display his/her armoury of double-stopping, two-part tremolos and left-hand pizzicato. It needs an air of insouciance, though, and I wanted less sinew and more sweetness from Benedetti. Heifetz is still the master here – glittering technique, but dusted with sugar too. **Mark Pullinger**

Shostakovich – selected comparisons:

Oistrakh, Leningrad PO, Mravinsky (1/59⁸, 4/88⁸) (REGI) RRC1385

Batiashvili, Bavarian RSO, Salonen

(3/11) (DG) 477 9299GH

Kavakos, Mariinsky, Gergiev (7/15) (MARI) MAR0524

Glazunov – selected comparisons:

Heifetz, RCA Victor Orch, Hendl

(6/72⁸, 10/86⁸) (RCA) 82876 66372-2

Granados

'Orchestral Works, Vol 2'

Goyescas – Intermezzo. Danza de los ojos verdes. Danza gitana. La nit del mort^a. Dante^b

^aGemma Coma-Alabert mez^aJesús Álvarez

^bCarrión ten^aLieder Càmera; Barcelona

Symphony Orchestra / Pablo González

Naxos  8 573264 (57' • DDD • T/t)



Naxos's centenary survey of Granados's orchestral music continues with a second disc from the Barcelona Symphony Orchestra under Pablo González, and like the first (5/16) it contains several premiere recordings – three, in fact. The most substantial is a symphonic poem dating from 1897, *La nit del mort*, to which Granados gave the forbidding subtitle 'poem of desolation'. Well, it sounds like a rather enjoyable desolation: a subtle, Impressionistic world straight out of César Franck or early Debussy. If we don't hear this 10-minute piece more often it's probably because six minutes in, after a tenor solo from Death himself (with eerie pizzicato and a snaking bass clarinet), it launches into a foursquare chorus on the Spanish equivalent of 'Dulce et decorum'.

But that first section shows González and his orchestra at their best, with grainy strings, piquant soft-edged woodwinds and a natural, musicianly way of shaping a phrase. Those qualities are all in evidence in two short gypsy dances and the familiar *Goyescas* Intermezzo; the slightly hazy Naxos sound complements performances that are affectionate and characterful but which, in the last analysis, smoulder rather than blaze.

That's particularly the case with the largest work on the disc, the two-movement, 34-minute symphonic poem *Dante*. Apparently contemporaries compared it favourably to Elgar's First. I wouldn't go quite that far – the ideas aren't strong enough and the *Tristan* influences aren't fully assimilated – but it's lush, atmospheric and, in its own way, haunting. González's expansive performance has stiff competition from Adrian Leaper's altogether more lustrous Gran Canaria Philharmonic on ASV, though the mezzo Gemma Coma-Alabert

makes an affecting Francesca da Rimini. Nonetheless, a welcome addition to the still surprisingly patchy Granados discography. **Richard Bratby**

Dante – selected comparison:

Gran Canaria PO, Leaper (9/01) (ASV) CDDCA1110

Haydn • Ligeti

Haydn Piano Concertos^a – No 4, HobXVIII/4;

No 11, HobXVIII/11. Capriccios – 'Acht

Sauschneider müssen sein', HobXVII/1;

Fantasia, HobXVII/4 Ligeti Piano Concerto^a.

Two Capriccios

Shai Wosner pf^aDanish National

Symphony Orchestra / Nicholas Collon

Onyx  ONYX4174 (80' • DDD)



Shai Wosner, the Israeli-born pianist now based in New York, already has several well-received solo discs to his credit, encompassing repertory by Schubert, Brahms, Sciarrino and Mazzoli. For his first recording with orchestra, he collaborates with the Danish National Symphony under Nicholas Collon in an interesting combination of concertos by Haydn and Ligeti, interspersed with solo pieces.

Unlike the Mozart concertos, Haydn's seem to present unusual obstacles when performed on modern pianos with full-size orchestras. Wosner's performances demonstrate that solutions to these challenges are possible, even using a concert grand. Both his Haydn concertos are fresh, agile, lithe and never less than expressive.

Wosner's plentiful embellishments derive from the organic structure of the phrase and always seem apt. As is often the case in Beethoven, Haydn's slow movements also seem to encompass the physical heart and *raison d'être* of the entire work. If the eloquence achieved in both *Adagios* derives from Wosner's poised rhetoric, much of their atmosphere is creditable to the tactful acumen of Collon and the Danes. Though not so distant stylistically (both concertos are thought to have been composed within four years), each speaks with a strikingly individual voice.

Naturally it is in Ligeti's 1988 Piano Concerto that the DNSO get to unfurl their full colours. During the course of five kaleidoscopic movements, a hand-in-glove ensemble is immediately apparent. Ligeti's compelling document of late-20th-century sensibility is revealed with finely calibrated attention to detail and an almost luridly sensual array of sonorities.



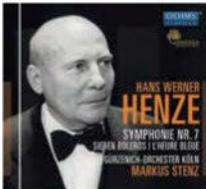
Pianist Shai Wosner (left) collaborates with conductor Nicholas Collon in Haydn and Ligeti on Onyx

From this dazzling display of colour and sound, soloist and ensemble convey a fundamental humanity so appealing that the concerto's 18 minutes seem over before they have begun.

The three large concerto gems are set in paired bouquets of Capriccios – Haydn's from 1765 and 1789, and Ligeti's set from 1947 – in performances that amplify and complement. I think few would disagree that, in terms of concept and execution, this is Shai Wosner's finest recording to date. **Patrick Rucker**

Henze

Symphony No 7. Sieben Boleros. Ouverture zu einem Theater. L'Upupa – Die blaue Stunde
Cologne Gürzenich Orchestra / Markus Stenz
 Oehms © OC446 (66' • DDD)



Is it inevitable that Henze's most orthodox symphony is destined to receive more recordings than any of his others? This is the fourth release of the Seventh, following on from Janowski (Wergo, 12/08), Cambreling (Hänssler Classic, 5/03) and, still most visceral and

compelling of all, Rattle (EMI/Warner, 11/93). Hunt around online and a broadcast of the 1984 premiere, with the Berlin Philharmonic under Gianluigi Gelmetti, is easy to find too.

Either way, it's a pleasure to see the composer's discography thickening out, particularly in Stenz's firm, assured hands. Forensically detailed and immaculately coloured even when this music is at its most violent, Stenz's unimpeachable Cologne players deliver an eerie mystery in the slow movement, as if recalling Berg in a bad dream, and capture the madness in what Henze called his 'nasty scherzo' with clinical, merciless ease. The flutter, the gentle sway of the finale's first bars nowhere else sounds so beguiling. But turn to Rattle and the atmosphere is more charged, the chasm between beauty and brutality more gaping. Henze's relationship with the symphonic tradition therefore sounds far more torn.

Stenz's couplings are novel and welcome. Henze's nods to Spanish music, the *Seven Boleros* (1998), have a gauzy quality, with a dangerous swagger in 'El pavo real' and a heated swing to 'La irascible'. His last completed piece, the *Ouverture zu einem Theater* (2012), provides an upbeat moment. Some confusion over the final

piece, though: what the booklet notes think is *L'heure bleue*, a ten-minute 2001 chamber piece, is actually 'Die blaue Stunde', the ravishing final tableau to the 2003 opera *L'Upupa und der Triumph der Sohnesliebe*. Easy mistake to make, I'm sure. **David Allen**

Mozart

Violin Concertos – No 3, K216;
 No 4, K218; No 5, K219
Norwegian Chamber Orchestra / Henning Kraggerud vn
 Naxos © 8 573513 (66' • DDD)

Mozart

Complete Violin Concertos. Rondos –
 K269/261a; K373. Adagio, K261
Hungarian Chamber Orchestra / Kristóf Baráti vn
 Brilliant Classics © ② 95368 (125' • DDD)
 Recorded live at the Kodály Centre, Pécs, Hungary,
 May 1-2, 2015



The Norwegian Chamber Orchestra has something of a reputation for working harmoniously with guest soloist-directors,

not least among them Leif Ove Andsnes in concertos by Mozart and Haydn. Their strength lies in the collaborative approach dictated by their modest dimensions and conductorless set-up. Those discs with Andsnes were conspicuously successful, both artistically and critically, and this new project with Henning Kraggerud is no less winning. While these are brisk, no-nonsense performances after the contemporary fashion, the thinking that underpins their shaping right from the very beginning makes these readings of the Third, Fourth and Fifth concertos worth returning to.

The admixture of Nordic coolness and a proactive approach to the scores is a potent one, and enables the 'character' moments – the drone episode in the finale of the Fourth or the Turkish dance in the same movement of the Fifth – to make their mark. Slow movements are not freighted with any Romantic lingering and so remain chaste without becoming frigid. Kraggerud provides his own cadenzas throughout, which demonstrate both his dexterity and his sympathy for the idiom, and never feel like anachronistic accretions. The sound and balance, too, are ideal, with the soloist integrated fully within the orchestral picture, just as he should be.

On two discs, Kristóf Baráti presents all five violin concertos, along with the two Rondos and the Adagio composed as separate or replacement movements. These are live performances, although they seem just as well drilled as Kraggerud's: I started listening out for missed pick-ups or lapses in ensemble but was soon won over by the characterful projection of Baráti's playing and the responsiveness of his Hungarian players.

The acoustic of the Kodály Centre in Pécs gives that much more bloom to the sound, and Baráti is clearly 'out front', although again he doesn't hog the spotlight. The live situation means that some tempi are more flexible, but Baráti, like Kraggerud, is businesslike and urbane in slow movements. These have an ideal singing tone but he doesn't pine for beauty elsewhere: there's just occasionally a gruff edge to the 1703 'Lady Harmsworth' Strad that provides added colour to his playing in faster music. Be warned that audience applause is retained; but those in the market for all five concertos (although sadly not the *Sinfonia concertante*, K364) will be far from disappointed, especially at Brilliant Classics' inviting price point.

David Threasher

FX Mozart · Clementi

'The Classical Piano Concerto, Vol 3'

Clementi Piano Concerto FX Mozart Piano

Concertos – No 1, Op 14; No 2, Op 25

St Gallen Symphony Orchestra /

Howard Shelley *p*

Hyperion (CDA68126 (71' • DDD)



For the third volume in Hyperion's Classical Piano Concerto series Howard Shelley has swapped the Ulster Orchestra for that of St Gallen and exchanges the camp drama of Steibelt (Vol 2, 1/16) for something – dare I say it – more musically rewarding.

Franz Xaver Mozart was born just four months before the death of his father Wolfgang Amadeus – so no pressure there. Certainly, Mozart's widow Constanze had high hopes for her son. He shared with his father a prodigious keyboard talent, and a wandering spirit which took him on concert tours all over Europe, for which, naturally, he needed concertos. He wrote the C major Piano Concerto when he was 18 and it possesses great charm. It begins almost insouciantly, and features some particularly striking writing for wind, not least the chromatic falling motif on the oboe just before the close of the opening movement, which gives a darker colouring to an otherwise exuberant C major. Shelley tucks into the solo part with almost nonchalant ease, alive to every colour change as Franz Xaver darts momentarily into minor keys. The variation-form second movement is based on a drooping theme which is introduced most effectively by strings. If the piano's filigree elaborations tend to be decorative rather than profound, there's again some very effective writing for wind, not least the bassoon, which takes the spotlight in the final variation, in which Franz Xaver surprises us at the last moment by a switch to the major. The delightfully capricious rondo finale is given with tremendous élan.

The Second Concerto dates from nine years later. While it still has the odd echo of Mozart *père*, it sounds distinctly Weberesque, not least in the use of clarinets. And the solo writing exploits the whole range of the keyboard, with Shelley finding a superb translucency even at the lowest register. He brings a real poignancy to the halting, minor-key slow movement, while the finale is brought to life with an unobtrusive felicity.

The disc ends with Clementi's only surviving piano concerto, probably written in the late 1780s. The piano part bristles with passages in thirds and sixths, contrasting with quicksilver filigree,

all of which Shelley dispatches fearlessly. If the piece seems to be built from more generic devices than those of Franz Xaver Mozart (not least the opening themes of the outer movements, both conventionally martial in tone) it's performed with complete aplomb by Shelley and co.

The central *Adagio e cantabile con grand' espressione* is perhaps the most individual movement, musically speaking, with the piano's improvisatory-sounding musing set against gentle commentary from the orchestra.

With a sympathetic recording and notes by Richard Wigmore that are, as ever, a pleasure to read, this is a compelling addition to Hyperion's catalogue.

Harriet Smith

Palmgren

'The River'

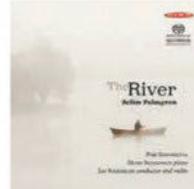
Piano Concertos^a – No 1; No 2, 'The River';

No 3, 'Metamorphoses'. Pieces, Op 78^b

Henri Sigfridsson *p*

Pori Sinfonietta / Jan Söderblom *bvn*

Alba (ABCD385 (72' • DDD/DSD)



The most interesting music on this disc comes first. Selim Palmgren's Second

Piano Concerto (b1913) starts with a mysterious, almost inaudible throbbing, and when the piano enters it is shadowed by a faintly exotic-sounding celesta. Never entirely predictable as it wends its episodic, rather short-breathed yet always attractive, 23-minute way, the piece could equally well be titled 'fantasy' or 'rhapsody'. It's not entirely surprising that Friedman, for one, took it into his repertoire. In fact it describes the course of the Kokemäki River, in particular through the town of Pori, where the composer spent his youth. The chamber orchestra now located there pays the score the compliment of maximum care and attention, while Henri Sigfridsson brings flexible phrasing and some finely blended textures to the solo part, as well as full technical aptitude.

Palmgren's five piano concertos span the central decades of his composing career. The First and Third confirm his indebtedness to the single-movement model of Liszt's concertos; and while it is hard to not to smile at the genial quality of the themes, it is equally hard not to crave more resourceful working out. Even in the intermittently colourful 'Metamorphoses' of an Ostrobothnian melody that constitute the Third Concerto, it's very much a case of business-as-usual in late-Romantic piano

concerto land. Dramatic tension was never Palmgren's forte, and neither was humour (think of the sport Dohnányi had with his nursery theme).

If Palmgren's name rings a bell, it's more like to be for his 300 or so musically undemanding piano miniatures than anything else, since these supplied reams of enjoyable material for generations of youngsters and amateurs. That talent certainly extended to the violin-and-piano repertoire, as the seven pieces that form his Op 48 here confirm. Here Sigfridsson is joined by Jan Söderblom, exchanging the conductor's baton for some nimble and euphonious fiddling.

David Fanning

Rachmaninov

Symphony No 2, Op 27

Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra / Mariss Jansons

RCO Live (CD) RCO16004 (56' • DDD/DSD)

Recorded live at the Concertgebouw, Amsterdam, January 28, 29 & 31, 2010



This is the third time Mariss Jansons has committed Rachmaninov's

Second Symphony to commercial disc, following earlier versions with the Philharmonia Orchestra and the St Petersburg Philharmonic. Or is it the fourth? At least some of the source material would appear to be shared with the rendition featured in RCO Live's anthology 'Mariss Jansons Live – The Radio Recordings 1990-2014' (RCO15002). The packaging cites three concert dates this time, January 28-29 and 31, 2010.

The resulting edit is enjoyable even if Jansons has limited interest in notions of 'authenticity'. Like many conductors trained in Soviet Russia he has never abandoned the timpani thwack on the final note of the first movement, underpinning (or undermining, according to taste) its final unison E on cellos and basses, and he still adds a vulgarising cymbal crash before the restatement of the second theme in the finale. He also has a trumpet double the 'big tune' at the climax of the third movement. This might seem unacceptable to some; but where André Previn's famous LSO recording lets the argument unfold naturally on a cushion of string sound, Jansons has always been more interventionist. While his speeds have slowed a little and the Concertgebouw acoustic imparts a softer

grain, much is as it always has been: the rubato personal and touching, the sudden *pianissimos* positively breathtaking (unless you judge them to be overdone), the textures shimmery and iridescent, flecked with woodwind colour others miss.

The problems come with the finale. You will doubtless have heard more propulsive interpretations yet Jansons still gets through the movement in 13'17", including a perhaps deliberately misleading swathe of terminal applause. How does he do it? By means of tactful pruning! The first return of the forceful opening material (ie between the quietly conspiratorial march interlude and the delayed arrival of another of the composer's 'big tunes') is here truncated in the manner favoured by Kurt Sanderling 60 years ago. 'Authenticity' of a different kind perhaps. This seems a pity when tempi are otherwise judicious and the structure finely balanced; but the St Petersburg recording is the one to go for. **David Gutman**

Selected comparisons:

Leningrad PO, K Sanderling (11/56th) (DG)

479 5516 or ▶ 449 767-2GOR

LSO, Previn (4/73rd) (WARN) 085289-2

Philh Orch, Jansons (8/88) (CHAN) CHAN8520

St Petersburg PO, Jansons (8/94th) (WARN) 500885-2

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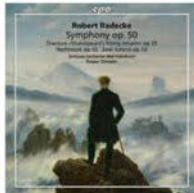
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Saturday 20 August | 6pm
Town Hall Birmingham

Tickets 0121 780 3333
www.thsh.co.uk

Radecke

Symphony, Op 50. Overture 'Shakespeare's König Johann', Op 25. Nachtstück, Op 55. Two Scherzos, Op 52
Biel Solothurn Symphony Orchestra / Kaspar Zehnder
 CPO (F) CPO0777 995-2 (65' • DDD)



With his high collars and long flowing hair, the Robert Radecke who gazes out from the back of the booklet looks every inch the young German Romantic. The booklet notes fill in the background. Radecke was born in Silesia in 1830 and held various conducting posts in Imperial Berlin. A youthful disciple of Schumann, he came to number Max Bruch and Joseph Joachim among his friends. You get the picture.

And on the strength of this recording, his music is much as you'd expect from a gifted professional musician working in that milieu. It's fluent, with occasional moments of poetry. I'm trying hard to avoid the term 'well-crafted', but there isn't really much more than can be said about his overture *King John*. And although the first movement of his F major Symphony (1877) was apparently inspired by the scenery of Switzerland, it makes only a mild impression, in a pleasantly lyrical way.

Radecke seems to have been more at ease in less complex forms: the symphony's Scherzo sets a Mendelssohn-like lightness against a surprising surge of passion in the central Trio section. The two orchestral Scherzos Op 52 (1888) explore that vein of fantasy more fully, with echoes of Brahms and – in the first – a curious pre-echo of Tchaikovsky's *Pathétique*. A *Nachtstück* dedicated to Joachim is effectively a full-scale symphonic movement, and in its outer sections Radecke manages to generate a real atmosphere of nocturnal solemnity.

The Sinfonie Orchester Biel Solothurn doesn't have the most luxurious tone in the world, and CPO's recording gives a slight predominance to the wind and brass, exposing occasional wobbles of ensemble and intonation. But overall, under its music director Kaspar Zehnder, the orchestra gives alert, musicianly performances, making this probably the only disc of Radecke's orchestral music that you'll ever need. **Richard Bratby**

Respighi

Sinfonia drammatica. Belfagor
Liège Royal Philharmonic Orchestra / John Neschling
 BIS (F) BIS2210 (70' • DDD/DSD)



Completed in June 1914, the *Sinfonia drammatica* is essentially an expression of Respighi's anxieties about the impending First World War. At its premiere a year later, however, when Italy was moving towards entering the conflict on the allied side, the score was criticised as overly Germanic. Elsa Respighi's subsequent failure to mention it in her biography of her husband, together with her statement that his first 'characteristic' work was *The Fountains of Rome* in 1916, has led to its frequent dismissal.

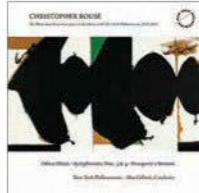
Listening to John Neschling's recording, you can understand the the initial controversy. The influences are, in fact, as much French as German: Franck's D minor Symphony is the structural model; Debussy lurks behind the chordal woodwind-writing. The main debt, however, is to Strauss's *Elektra*, from which its five-note principal theme derives, and the turbulent mood of which it to some extent replicates.

'Drammatica' is an indication of tone rather than content, and this is a score that seems to be in constant, violent motion, though there are also flashes forwards to *The Pines of Rome* in the closing peroration, with its massive crescendo over a steady, repetitive pulse. Neschling admirably sustains the fever pitch throughout – nothing becomes overblown or unduly hysterical – and the playing is first-rate in its dark intensity and force.

The filler is the *Belfagor* overture, reworking material from an unsuccessful 1923 opera of the same name about the devil assuming human form in order to corrupt the virtuous heroine Candida. It's an attractively scored piece of diablerie, superbly played. **Tim Ashley**

Rouse

Odna Zhizn^a. Prospero's Rooms^b.
 Symphonies – No 3^c; No 4^d
New York Philharmonic Orchestra / Alan Gilbert
 Dacapo (F) 8 226110 (76' • DDD)
 Recorded live at David Geffen Hall, Lincoln Center, New York, ^aFebruary 20, 2010; ^bApril 17, 2013; ^cJune 20, 2013; ^dJune 5, 2014



Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic have already set down a cycle of the Nielsen symphonies together

with recent orchestral works by Magnus Lindberg for the Dacapo label. This latest disc focuses on Lindberg's successor as the orchestra's Marie-Josée Kravis Composer-in-Residence, Christopher Rouse (b1949), whom Gilbert has long championed, having already recorded the first two of his symphonies with the Royal Stockholm Philharmonic (BIS, 1/10).

The Third Symphony (2011) follows on directly from its predecessors in terms of musical idiom. Rouse has cited Prokofiev's Second Symphony as the governing influence, and this two-movement work proceeds from an initial *Allegro*, whose tensile sonata design evokes its model even aside from several allusions, to a theme with five variations that streamlines the discursive trajectory of the Prokofiev into a simple though effective alternation of stasis and dynamism. This culminates in a heightened recall of the theme, then a coda of fateful decisiveness.

Even more absorbing is the Fourth Symphony (2013), not least through its striking out on an appreciably different path. Equivocation is the watchword: whether in the translucent texture and warmly enervated manner of the initial 'Felice' or the ensuing 'Doloroso' that gradually loses momentum as it draws into itself on the way to a sepulchral close. Intriguing, not least because the composer has pointedly refrained from discussing any more concrete 'meaning', and it will be fascinating to hear just where Rouse's symphonic odyssey is headed (the first performance of his Fifth Symphony is scheduled by the Dallas Symphony for next season).

Odna Zhizn (2008) – the Russian for 'A Life' – is a homage to a close friend and, for all the pungent aggression at its centre, it is the ethereal music either side that lingers in the memory. *Prospero's Rooms* (2012) is the 'overture' to an unwritten opera on Edgar Allan Poe's *The Masque of the Red Death*, but what resulted is so rich in incident as to be its own justification. No less persuasive is the advocacy of Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic, heard to advantage in sound of clarity and depth. Rouse devotees and newcomers alike have no reason to hesitate. **Richard Whitehouse**

Schumann

'Complete Symphonic Works, Vol 6'
 Shymphony, 'Zwickau', WoO29. Genoveva, Op 81 – Overture. Szenen aus Goethes Faust, WoO3 – Overture. Overtures – Die Braut von Messina, Op 100; Hermann und Dorothea, Op 136; Julius Caesar, Op 128; Manfred, Op 115
WDR Symphony Orchestra, Cologne / Heinz Holliger
 Audite (F) AUDITE97 705 (76' • DDD)



Alan Gilbert and the New York Philharmonic Orchestra showcase works by Christopher Rouse



With this sixth and final volume in his series of the 'Complete Symphonic Works', Heinz Holliger mops up the remaining segment of Schumann's orchestral output.

That's all six of his overtures: operatic (*Genoveva*), quasi-operatic (*Faust Scenes*), Shakespearean (*Julius Caesar*), Byronesque (*Manfred*) and German Romantic (Schiller's *The Bride of Messina* and a delightfully loopy response to Goethe's *Hermann and Dorothea*, complete with a plethora of piped renditions of the Marseilleise). To fill up the disc there's Schumann's first attempt at a symphony, the two movements of a work in G minor that's now most commonly known as the 'Zwickau' Symphony.

That makes Holliger's the most complete cycle of the orchestral works to have arrived in ages. Dausgaard's three single discs (BIS) took in all the symphonic works (including both versions of the Fourth Symphony) along with the six overtures, while Gardiner's triple-set, on period instruments, dispensed with the overtures but included the wonderful *Konzertstück* for four horns and orchestra. If and when Holliger's six

full-price discs come out in a budget-price box, that'll make this easily one of the most attractive collections of this music.

For those less bothered about such notions of completeness, other attractions include Holliger's clear-sighted interpretations, revealed in sound that is focused without being over-analytical. Perhaps the youthful 'Zwickau' piece and the much later concert overtures can't boast the winning melodies that make the greatest of Schumann's works stand out but they display all the composer's motivic skills and his development of the Beethovenian model in his own Romantic language, and offer valuable alternative lights on his orchestral career. **David Thresher**

Shostakovich

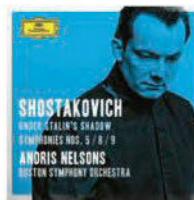
Symphonies - No 5, Op 47^a; No 8, Op 65^b

No 9, Op 70^c. Hamlet - Suite, Op 32a^d

Boston Symphony Orchestra / Andris Nelsons

DG M ② 479 5201GH2 (158' • DDD)

Recorded live at Symphony Hall, Boston, ^cOctober and ^aNovember 2015; ^dFebruary and ^bMarch 2016



After their scorching performance of the Tenth Symphony (8/15) raised the bar

unassailably high, the question loomed as to whether or not this next instalment in Nelson's Boston Shostakovich cycle could possibly measure up to such an impressive start. In the case of the Fifth Symphony, yes, undoubtedly; in the case of the Eighth, less so.

The Ninth, of course, was (along with the Sixth) a calculated surprise on the part of the composer – a piece clearly designed to wrong-foot the establishment, whose expectation was for something 'other': in this case something which might pointedly celebrate the Soviet victory over the Nazis. But Shostakovich wasn't about to wave the flag for Stalin under any circumstances and the quirky Ninth is a V-sign (the other kind) to oppression rather closer to home.

Nelsons is spry and precisioned and his insistence on super-keen rhythm pays off big-time. Really notable in the first movement is the way in which he deploys accents and *subito fortissimo* – the aural equivalent of tongues irreverently poked out at any and every authority. The wistful understatement of the second-movement *Moderato* is then countered by an absolutely blistering *Presto* – a dazzling display of orchestral juggling skills, not least from the tumbling Boston woodwinds. I love, too, the way the ensuing trombone

proclamation (sonorously over-egged here) seems to portend an epic slow movement when in fact the solitary bassoon's failure to encourage others to join in his lament leaves him no alternative but to send in the clowns. They arrive with the pompous Red Army Band in tow and Nelsons again really underlines the cynicism.

Tom Stoppard's Rosencrantz and Guildenstern would have recognised the coarse irreverence of Shostakovich's Elsinore – this being the first of the composer's brushes with Shakespeare's tragedy in the shape of Nikolai Asimov's farcical 1932 Moscow production of *Hamlet* which predictably annoyed Party officials almost as much as it might have amused the author. Even Ophelia skips off to her watery grave, pathos reduced to bathos as the body count rises. Nelsons lends the Suite from that score a rolicking irony so that even the appearance of the 'Dies irae' in the closing 'Requiem' sounds like a bad joke.

So to the great Eighth Symphony, repeatedly shaken as it is by the remorseless thunder of war. The Soviets thought it irredeemably gloomy but Nelsons finds beauty in its hopefulness. The long cor anglais solo emerging from the seismic upheaval of percussion in the first movement shows just how this consolation in adversity can work and the alliance of cellos and basses in this performance repeatedly finds poetry in the searching bass-lines. It's amazing how tender a sound so sombre can be.

But it has to be said that Nelsons never quite goes to that dark place that the old guard like Mravinsky recognise so well, and at times one simply wants more of the trenchancy that Nelsons's account of the Tenth Symphony's Scherzo gave us in spades. The ferocious third-movement *Allegro non troppo* is implacably deliberate (*non troppo*) and there is a wicked bite to the trombones when they take up the Toccata – but surely the first trumpet needs to be coarser in the Trio and surely that timpani-driven crescendo should threaten to rip the piece apart at the seams? It doesn't – quite.

The Fifth Symphony is quite marvellous, though, and like the Tenth should dominate the catalogue for a long time to come. I love the way the first subject sounds for all the world like a remnant of Tchaikovsky's legacy as opposed to 'a Soviet artist's reply to just criticism'. The romantic nature of the piece is lushly served – nowhere more so than in the ravishing *Largo*, infused as it is with the spirit of star-crossed lovers (Shostakovich almost invoking the fragrant world of Prokofiev's *Romeo and Juliet*) and quite wonderfully chronicled by the Boston

Symphony strings – as downy in repose as they are intense *in extremis*. The entire movement sounds 'headier' than I've ever heard it since the famous Previn/LSO recording from the 1960s. The hushed celesta-flecked coda is breathtaking.

There is high drama as well as beauty, though, and the first movement is ripe with bold contrasts. Out of the seraphic second subject comes the militaristic development, wildly exciting with trumpets flaring thrillingly at the transition into the goose-stepping march – a real volte-face – and Nelsons is masterly in screwing up the tension right through to the crushing trombone inversion of the opening bars. The finale, too, brings thrills and spills – a rip-roaring central climax for one (just listen to the trumpets' *sforzando* fanfares) – and now that interpreters have finally sorted out the metronome marking we continue to get the colossal irony of the 'oppressively' triumphal coda. To say that it brings the house down is something of an understatement. **Edward Seckerson**

Sibelius

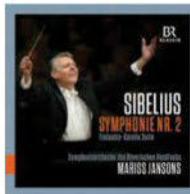
Symphony No 2, Op 43^a.

Finlandia, Op 26^b. Karelia Suite, Op 11^b

Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra / Mariss Jansons

BR-Klassik F 900144 (70' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Herkulessaal der Residenz, Munich, ^bOctober 15 & 16, ^aNovember 12 & 13, 2015



Virtuoso conducting and immaculate orchestral playing, for sure, but there are drawbacks. *Finlandia* distils plenty of truculent defiance but there's also a whiff of flashiness, as well as some over-succulent retouching of scoring that fails to convince (try from 6'42"). The *Karelia* Suite, too, is not free of fussy mannerism: the swaggering central processional of the Intermezzo acquires a baffling, almost comic rigidity; the Ballade is hampered by some exaggerated dynamics; and a comparable slickness blights the concluding 'Alla marcia', which should surely twinkle with a little more fun than it does here (and the extra cymbal clash at the very end really jars).

If anything, the performance of the Second Symphony (captured four weeks later in the Herkulessaal) is even more problematic. Both of Jansons's previous versions (from Oslo and Amsterdam) left me cold and, sad to relate, so too does this pristine newcomer. For all the burnished timbre and silky polish of the Bavarian

RSO, Jansons's direction is calculated to a fault, the music-making evincing a knowing sophistication that tends to deflect one's attention away from Sibelius's heart-warming inspiration. He's also not shy about adding a few questionable tweaks of his own (yes, that is a trombone bolstering the bassoon line from fig I or 5'06" in the development of the opening *Allegretto*).

Decidedly not to my taste, then, and, as far as the symphony is concerned, no match for a whole host of legendary analogue predecessors – Kajanus (1930), Koussevitzky (1935), BBC SO/Beecham (1954), Monteux (1959) and RPO/Barbirolli (1963) – let alone such recent sparky, illuminating and communicative offerings from the likes of Storgårds, Kamu and (Jansons's own younger countryman and protégé) Andris Nelsons, who encourages his Bostonians to give of their fervent and golden-toned best (6/15).

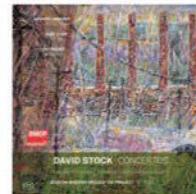
Andrew Achenbach

Stock

Concierto cubano^a. Oborama^b.

Percussion Concerto^c

^bAlex Klein obs ^aAndrés Cárdenes vn ^cLisa Pegher
perc Boston Modern Orchestra Project / Gil Rose
BMOP/sound F 1047 (60' • DDD)



When the Pittsburgh composer David Stock died last year, aged 76, he was celebrated for the hearty contributions he had made to the musical health of his city. He founded the Pittsburgh New Music Ensemble in 1976 and wrote plenty of warm-spirited music for that group and for various ensembles at the local university (Duquesne) where he taught for many years. He often borrowed from jazz and traditional musics and he had a thing for jaunty titles (*Earth Beat* for timpani and winds? *Sax Appeal* for four saxophones?). His scores have a feel of being community-minded and unguarded if not especially radical – in the booklet-notes to this disc of three late-ish concertos, Mark Yacovone writes that Stock 'is not interested in gaining our attention through uncharted waters', which is a generous way of describing music that openly relies on the familiar, the clichéd and the comfortable.

But there is a fondness in these pieces that's endearing. It is easy to hear that Stock wrote each concerto for a musician he knew well and that he injected the music with elements of their biographies. In the last movement of *Concierto cubano* (2000), Cuban-born violinist Andrés Cárdenes

darts about with a lithe, energetic sound while the string section plucks out pizzicato clave rhythms. It's playful and upbeat; just don't think to deeply about the politics of cultural appropriation. *Oborama* is a concerto for oboe(s) from 2010, in which an agile Alex Klein switches between five different members of the oboe family. The music for each is fairly typecast: the cor anglais opens with a plaintive melody over moody strings; a musette follows with little morse-code-like bleeps against dry percussion, the bass oboe adds a lush, lyrical tune and so on until a bouncy closing movement for standard oboe. The Percussion Concerto of 2007 (no clever title this time) contains the most straight-up saccharine writing of the three works on the disc. Soloist Lisa Pegher plays soft-edged sounds with great care and suppleness while the Boston Modern Orchestra Project add gushing strings and affirming trumpet fanfares. Gil Rose conducts with big gestures and bright energy. **Kate Molleson**

Stojowski · Wieniawski

'The Romantic Violin Concerto, Vol 20'

Stojowski Violin Concerto, Op 22. **Romanze**, Op 20 **Wieniawski** Fantaisie brillante sur des motifs de l'opéra Faust de Gounod, Op 20

Bartłomiej Nizioł vn BBC Scottish

Symphony Orchestra / Łukasz Borowicz

Hyperion (CDA68102) (56' • DDD)



Bartłomiej Nizioł
(b1974 in Poland)
has a seductively
silky-smooth tone

and a narrow vibrato, and plays with exactly the kind of lyrical, ecstatic intensity that Stojowski's demanding Violin Concerto requires. He is partnered by Łukasz Borowicz who, as in his Hyperion piano concerto recordings with Jonathan Plowright, lends an explosive dynamic to proceedings. Both are captured in vivid sound by producer Jeremy Hayes.

Composed probably in 1899, the concerto is, to apply a useful critical adjective, elusive in the sense that the listener, anticipating in a Romantic concerto a strong first subject, memorable second subject and ravishing orchestral colours will have to be satisfied, on this occasion, with just the latter. Stojowski's motifs and figures pass by in a rapid kaleidoscopic procession while the structure, as Nigel Simone notes in the booklet, 'feels free, unfolding in a way that is almost rhapsodic'. Few will be able to resist the

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soaring rapture of the second movement or the lively finale. Throughout, there are few bars when the soloist is not playing. The concerto is followed by Stojowski's delightful *Romanze* (6'40"), written at about the same time and dedicated to Jacques Thibaud.

The premiere recordings of both works were recorded by the excellent Agnieszka Marucha in 2008. While her student orchestra is not quite the BBC Scottish and the sound is not Hyperion's, she includes Stojowski's not insubstantial (28'09") *Sonata No 2* for violin and piano on a disc that is very much worth considering.

The Hyperion programme is completed by the *Fantaisie on Gounod's Faust*, a work by Wieniawski (a Polish composer from an earlier generation) which, unlike the Stojowski pieces, is an unabashed showpiece. It ends with an exquisitely challenging treatment (partly in harmonics) of the famous Act 2 waltz, featured by Liszt in his better known *Faust Paraphrase* for piano solo. Nizioł despatches this with the same jaunty good humour (but in a brighter sound picture) as Vadim Brodsky and Antoni Wit back in 1988.

Jeremy Nicholas

Stojowski – selected comparison:

Marucha, Orch of the Elsner School, Warsaw, Wajrak (1/10) (ACTE) AP0221

Wieniawski – selected comparison:

Brodsky, Polish RSO, Wit (ARTS) 47313-2

Tchaikovsky



Symphonies – No 1, 'Winter Daydreams', Op 13;

No 2, 'Little Russian', Op 17; No 5, Op 64

Royal Liverpool Philharmonic Orchestra /

Vasily Petrenko

Onyx M ② ONYX4150 (118' • DDD)



Vasily Petrenko's gripping recording of Tchaikovsky's *Manfred* Symphony with the Royal Liverpool Philharmonic (Naxos, 1/09) tantalised listeners that a complete cycle may be in the offing. That was back in 2009. Seven years on – and jumping ship from Naxos to Onyx – that wish is set to be granted. It was worth the wait: this release of Symphonies Nos 1, 2 and 5 makes the best possible start to the projected cycle.

We're certainly not short of symphonic Tchaikovsky on disc. A number of UK orchestras headed by Russian conductors (Vladimir Jurowski with the LPO, Valery Gergiev with the LSO) have been active on the Tchaikovsky front in recent years, along with the Ukrainian Kirill Karabits in – appropriately enough – the *Little Russian*

(No 2), but Petrenko and the RLPO emerge from the pack strongly.

I've always shared a fondness for Tchaikovsky's First Symphony, whose subtitle is usually translated as *Winter Daydreams* (although *Winter Reveries* is a more accurate translation of 'Zimniye gryozy'). Petrenko's approach makes me love it all the more. He sets brisk tempi – the first movement is a bracing troika ride through the snow, with pin-sharp playing and breathless excitement. The RLPO strings may not be as opulent as their LSO counterparts but their playing is crisp and lithe. This is an extrovert reading; listen to the lively timpani volley in the third movement's closing pages (6'40") or the jaunty Cossack dance finale, where Tchaikovsky employs a genuine Russian folksong, 'The garden bloomed'. Here the orchestra is at its exuberant, unbuttoned best, even outdoing Jurowski's LPO for excitement.

Folksong plays its part in the Second. Horn and bassoon are at their most *cantabile* in the mournful 'Down by Mother Volga' in the *Andante sostenuto* introduction before the *Allegro vivo* kicks in (3'21") with strenuous attack. Petrenko rattles through this movement considerably faster than Gergiev and Karabits and bustles the RLPO along in a skittering Scherzo. It's only in the perky march in between (which Tchaikovsky originally composed for his opera *Undine*) that Petrenko drags his feet a touch. The variation-based finale (featuring the Ukrainian folksong 'The Crane') isn't great music but Petrenko bursts the bombastic introduction deliciously, whipping up an exciting finale, punctuated by a doom-laden tam-tam before a joyous coda.

Petrenko's Fifth is terrific too, if not quite as blistering as Jurowski's; that performance with the LPO remains the best of recent years. The Fate motto is quietly announced by the RLPO clarinets before being swept away by torrents of impassioned playing. There is a glowing nobility about the first horn's solo in the *Andante cantabile* before massed brass bite hard in a chilling restatement of the Fate motif. The turbulent finale leads culminates in a stoic reiteration of the main theme, before the coda gallops away triumphantly.

If future releases match these impetuous, glorious performances, Petrenko's should be a cycle to be reckoned with.

Mark Pullinger

Symphonies Nos 1 & 2 – selected comparison:

LSO, Gergiev (12/12) (LSO) LSO0710

Symphony No 1 – selected comparison:

LPO, Jurowski (11/09) (LPO) LPO0039

Symphony No 2 – selected comparison:

Bournemouth SO, Karabits (3/12) (ONYX) ONYX4074

Symphony No 5 – selected comparison:

LPO, Jurowski (12/12) (LPO) LPO0064

Van der Aa

Hysteresis^a. Violin Concerto^b

^aKari Kriikku ^c ^bJanine Jansen *vn* ^aAmsterdam

Sinfonietta / Candida Thompson; ^bRoyal

Concertgebouw Orchestra / Vladimir Jurowski

Disquiet Media ^④ DQM05 (43' • DDD)

Recorded live at the ^aStadsgehoorzaal, Leiden, June 11, 2014; ^bConcertgebouw, Amsterdam, September 20, 2015



Van der Aa acolytes may be surprised at the lack of a visual element in his new

Violin Concerto (2014), especially after the 'engrossing and unsettling' (Richard Whitehouse, 4/12) experience that was his film-cum-cello concerto *Up Close*. In a sense, though, there is a visual element here, and it's the dedicatee Janine Jansen: the way she holds herself in performance, the 'theatrical' nature of her delivery and the energy she transmits to musical collaborators, all of which, according to the composer, shaped the score.

The concerto is unashamedly a showpiece: an often confrontational, sometimes compliant but always imposing discourse between soloist and orchestra. The work's disquieting energy may be characteristic of the composer but there are only passing references to his proven ability to find the physical qualities in a phrase or gesture and examine them as if from every angle. In that sense, half of me thinks the concerto less distinctive than almost any other work I've heard by him; the other half is sucked in by the thrill of the ride.

For that thank Jansen and Jurowski, who deliver a performance of immense presence, conviction and tonal lustre. Van der Aa has captured the violinist's musical persona to the point where it can sound as if she's improvising and the RCO relish his fascinating orchestrations. Like, for example, the sound of sand being brushed on a drumhead, which seems to open *Hysteresis* (2013) as well as the concerto.

That sound has an electronic, static quality but only in *Hysteresis* do we hear actual electronics, specifically as sampled bits of soloist Kari Kriikku's playing come back to troll him as his identity crises deepens. Kriikku plays wonderfully and finds all the theatre in that situation and others, the Amsterdam Sinfonietta with



The composer Michael Van der Aa (left) looks on as Vladimir Jurowski and violinist Janine Jansen rehearse his new violin concerto

him all the way. First-class presentation as always from Van der Aa's own label, except the booklet-note – if it's intended as a parody of sycophantic, new-music mumbo-jumbo then it's very amusingly done.

Andrew Mellor

Zemlinsky · R Strauss

R Strauss *Till Eulenspiegels lustige Streiche*,

Op 28 Zemlinsky *Die Seejungfrau*

Luxembourg Philharmonic Orchestra /

Emmanuel Krivine

Alpha (F) ALPHA236 (61' · DDD)



It maybe seems a bit unfair to pit Strauss's brilliant *Till Eulengspiegel*

against *Die Seejungfrau*, more of a slow-burn affair by a composer whose gifts were a little less prodigious. And Zemlinsky's 1903 'fantasy in three movements' after *The Little Mermaid* is even more of a slow-burner in the new critical edition by Antony Beaumont recorded here, which reinstates four minutes of lost music in the middle movement (the work itself was rediscovered only in the

1980s, after Zemlinsky more or less cast it aside following the 1905 premiere alongside Schoenberg's *Pelleas und Melisande*).

Emmanuel Krivine has long been a champion of the score, and this recording – the last of a series made with the Luxembourg orchestra of which he was chief conductor until last year – shows that he has a firm grip on its structure. It's a somewhat diffuse work, a slippery creature to get a hold on, given the fact that, unlike *Till*, it is not overtly narrative. But it contains some wonderful music and is full of gentle yearning and delicious *fin de siècle* ripeness and *Weltshmerz*. And Krivine clearly loves it, bringing ardency to the *Gurrelieder*-like love music, and doing a pretty good job of conjuring up the mysterious, ominous ocean deep which forms its foundation.

It's a shame, though, that the recorded sound captured in the Philharmonie Luxembourg is rather fussy, its focus on surface details obscuring those all-important depths and forcing us to lose any grander sonic panorama. Busier passages sound cluttered and congested (listen from nine minutes into the first movement for example, or to the big burst of sea spray that opens the second movement), solo

contributions are too closely miked and the orchestral picture is short on shimmer. It does the work few favours; ditto the orchestra, whose sound can come across as brittle and unrefined. It doesn't help make a case for the extended version, either, which is far better served by Ondine's luxurious sound for John Storgårds and the Helsinki Philharmonic (the only other recording of this version). Stick with that for the new edition; personal favourites for the more widely recorded shorter version, meanwhile, include Chailly and Dausgaard (on Decca and Chandos respectively).

Happily the sound is less of a problem in the sprightly and springy Strauss. Krivine doesn't dilly-dally, and it serves as a fine showcase for the orchestra's soloists, even if the playing is not a match for the finest orchestras in this work. Hugo Shirley

Zemlinsky – selected comparisons:

Berlin RSO, Chailly (6/87) (DECC) 444 969-2DH

Danish Nat SO, Dausgaard (9/98) (CHAN) CHAN9601

Helsinki PO, Storgårds (6/15) (ONDI) ODE1237-5

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Rachmaninov's Second Symphony

Mariss Jansons talks to Geoffrey Norris about a work he has recorded for the third time

What's this I'm hearing? Are my ears deceiving me? Or is one of the two conductors I admire most in the entire world telling me that Rachmaninov's Second Symphony is 'a bit on the long side'? Cuts in Rachmaninov have always been a controversial issue. The Second Symphony and the Third Piano Concerto have in the past been the usual casualties, but these days it is rare to hear them done in truncated form, and I never thought to hear Mariss Jansons say that, on occasion, there might be some justification for the odd snip. In the only autograph manuscript of the Second Symphony known to have survived there is no indication at all that Rachmaninov contemplated cuts or foresaw the day when they might be needed. And Jansons's comment is even more of a surprise, given the fact that his new recording of the Second Symphony with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra for the orchestra's own label, performed in full, is remarkable for the way in which the ideas in the music germinate, grow and generate such a powerful, organic life force.

'When I'm touring the symphony, I avoid routine. My players know that yesterday I did an accelerando but today I may not'

Jansons does, however, qualify his remark about cuts. When making a recording of the symphony, he would conduct the score intact. Only in a concert performance might he shave some bars from the finale, because, he says, 'There are instances where Rachmaninov stays in one place and doesn't know how to move forward'. When we meet in Amsterdam, Jansons is midway through a run of *The Queen of Spades* at Dutch National Opera, so it's understandable that Tchaikovsky might be at the forefront of his mind, and he draws a parallel between Rachmaninov's reiteration of material in the Second Symphony's finale with the way Tchaikovsky so often (especially in the ballets, but also in the symphonies) repeats phrases verbatim. Up to 105 bars can be lost if these restatements are left out, and I've always found it thoroughly disorientating if the finale doesn't run its full course, but Jansons reasons that in a concert performance the constancy of an audience's concentration might sometimes be in jeopardy if the finale is played complete. 'Generally,



Mariss Jansons is guided by the emotions of the work as much as by the notes

though,' he says, 'you shouldn't do it.' I've certainly endured some tame and unflattering performances of the Second Symphony in my time, so it is clearly not a symphony that, so to speak, plays itself, but Jansons is a conductor who knows just how to maintain the finale's impulse and energy throughout its entire span. In any case, in this full-length recording, cuts are happily not a contentious issue.

One factor that might be, however, concerns the very last note of the first movement. Neither the existing manuscript nor the standard Boosey & Hawkes score gives any hint that a timpani thwack should bolster the cellos' and basses' unison bottom E in the final bar. Jansons is by no means alone in



The historical view

Rachmaninov

Letter of February 11, 1907

'I have composed a symphony. It's true! It's only ready in rough. I finished it a month ago and immediately put it aside. I got heartily sick of it, and I'm not going to think about it any more. But I am mystified how the newspapers got on to it.'

The Times

Review of British premiere, May 1910

'Rachmaninov's new symphony...is homogeneous in that much of its thematic material in the opening movements bears at least a family likeness to that of the remainder...but [the symphony] is of portentous length.'

Valery Gergiev

Rehearsing the LSO in 2008

'We have to follow the accents melodically, not rhythmically, and each bar should never be the same. We have to save Rachmaninov from sounding repetitive; we should use such a range of sonority that it is always different.'

adding one here, though other conductors opt to leave the cellos and basses to their own devices, as the score indicates. 'If I could ask Rachmaninov,' says Jansons, 'he could tell me the reason,' but as far as Jansons is concerned that final *sforzando* E needs the timpani's support. 'If Rachmaninov had marked it *pianissimo*, I could have understood,' he says, 'but for me it's an energetic gesture and needs a strong beat.' There are many Second Symphony aficionados who get really hot under the collar about the timpani fortifying that bottom E, so I merely pass on this information without comment.

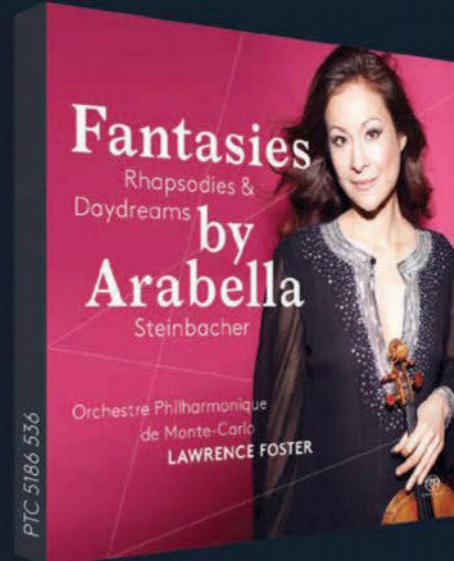
Jansons has previously recorded the Second Symphony with the Philharmonia (1986, Chandos) and the St Petersburg Philharmonic (1993, EMI), choosing, as on this new Royal Concertgebouw disc, not to do the repeat of the first movement exposition, believing that the proportions of exposition, development and recapitulation in a lengthy movement are preserved more satisfactorily without it. In his general approach to interpretation, he admits that he has changed over the years. In his younger days, when he was 'more disciplined', he was inclined to follow the letter of the score. 'I didn't unleash my fantasy at all,' he says, 'but when I became older I appreciated that music equals feelings. What's behind this phrase? Why did Rachmaninov write it? What did he want to say?' It is for that reason that a Jansons interpretation nowadays embraces facets that are not explicit in the score as well as those that are. From his studies, his reading and his experience (all of which 'open the door to my fantasy', as he puts it) he intuits much about the emotions of the piece as well as being guided by Rachmaninov's instructions. So, from time to time there will be slight changes to the printed dynamics to reinforce or highlight an important line, or a particular emphasis on, say, the first beat of a long brass chord to underpin a harmonic point. As Jansons says, 'You have to remember that we are now performing with a modern orchestra, and the sound is different from the one in Rachmaninov's time.' Compensations are sometimes necessary to achieve a balance or a particular clarity of focus, Jansons's guiding principle being that his 'first duty is to do what the composer would have wanted', using instinct as well as observing the directions in the score.

None of this is set in aspic, however, and Jansons stresses that his interpretative thoughts are always in flux. Particularly when he is undertaking a tour with the Second Symphony, he will strive to 'avoid routine'. 'My orchestras know that yesterday I did an *accelerando* but that today I might not.' They are rehearsed thoroughly, not least to fine-tune those potentially hazardous passages (the light, busy *fugato* section in the *scherzo*, for instance, or the many occasions when interweaving string lines require absolute precision of ensemble): 'with 70 strings, it's not easy,' as Jansons acknowledges. One further overarching question is that of the music's pulse. This is something that in part is guided by Rachmaninov's tempo indications and metronome markings, but they do not tell the whole story. 'Momentum' is a word that crops up several times during this conversation, whether that momentum is at a slow pace or a fast one. If his sixth sense tells him that the music needs to push forward, he will push forward, even if there is no mention of it in the score. Likewise, if he feels that the music is telling him to pull back, he will pull back, deploying a subtle spectrum of rubato which, as he says, 'this music allows you', in the interests of finding its 'inner drama'. Even so, Jansons admits that he always knows he could have done things differently. 

► To read our review of Mariss Jansons's Rachmaninov Second turn to page 41

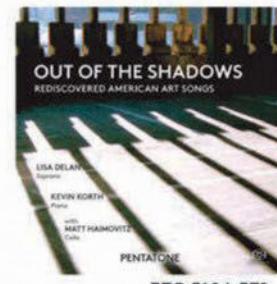
PENTATONE

Arabella Steinbacher
Orchestre Philharmonique de Monte-Carlo
Lawrence Foster

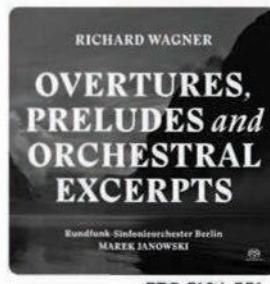


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Chamber



Hannah Nepil on a new pairing of Prokofiev's violin sonatas:

'What emerges is a fully fleshed-out picture in which these sonatas become part of a coherent whole' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 54**



Andrew Mellor listens to Mark Simpson's 'Night Music' on NMC:

'Simpson has an awful lot of music inside him and plenteous discipline when it comes to writing it down' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 56**

Abrahamsen

Works for Wind Quintet'

Abrahamsen Landskaber (Landscapes).

Wind Quintet No 2, 'Walden' **Ravel** Le tombeau de Couperin **Schumann** Kinderszenen, Op 15 (both arr Abrahamsen)

Ensemble MidtVest

Dacapo (F) 8 226090 (51' • DDD)



The Ophelia of Hans Abrahamsen's *let me tell you* (2013), the contemporary 'work of

the moment', surrenders to the deadly whiteness of snow. Here's some useful context to where that whiteness came from. With *Landscapes* (1972) Abrahamsen was clearing the decks. In directing the musicians of his wind quintet to play *senza espressivo* and not stray from each of the three movement's specified dynamics, the effect is of a resounding, inviting neutrality.

With those decks cleared, Abrahamsen could deliver *Walden* (1978), a piece of 'meticulously detailed minimalism', to quote Jens Cornelius's booklet-note, that imposes rigorous but organic procedures upon a narrow range of tonal material. Those procedures result in music that reflects the changes and chances – the predictable unpredictability – of what you might see if you sat in a forest looking in one direction for a long time. Here and in *Landscapes*, the performances have space and purity to match (far more so, in the case of the latter, than Dacapo's 2001 version).

At the end of the '80s, when Abrahamsen felt his brand of New Simplicity was spiralling into complexity, he stopped writing original music and focused on transcriptions. In his 2005 rewrite of Schumann's *Kinderszenen* you immediately miss a piano's improvisatory push and pull. But there are payoffs aplenty in the capering oom-pah suggestions of 'Hasche-Mann', the wistfulness of Tomasso Lonquich's clarinet in 'Träumerei' and the ensemble-borne lilt of 'Kind im Einschlummern'.

Even more relevant is an underlining of the childish in music where much of the sense of sophistication comes from naturally urbane piano renditions. That's apparent, too, in Abrahamsen's quintet arrangement of the orchestrated movements of Ravel's *Le tombeau de Couperin*. You can't quite hear the twisting tune of the Forlane in this performance, but elsewhere all the score's curious mixture of bite and nostalgia is absolutely and deliciously conveyed.

Andrew Mellor

Walden – selected comparison: Wind sols (DACA) 8 224155

Brahms

Cello Sonatas - No 1, Op 38; No 2, Op 99

Marie-Elisabeth Hecker vc **Martin Helmchen** pf Alpha (F) ALPHA223 (53' • DDD)



When Brahms played through his First Cello Sonata with its dedicatee, Josef Gänsbacher, the cellist apparently complained that he couldn't hear himself over the piano. 'Lucky you,' muttered Brahms. There's no such problem on this new disc from Marie-Elisabeth Hecker and Martin Helmchen. As Hecker calmly, eloquently shapes her low-lying opening melody, Helmchen's off-beat piano chords don't so much drive the rhythm as hang from her line – helped by a recording that places the cello ever so slightly forward.

That's no bad thing. Brahms may have followed Beethoven's cue in describing these pieces as sonatas for piano and cello, rather than the other way around, but there's no question that balance can be an issue. Not here; both instruments come through clear and unforced, enabling Hecker to take the lead in shaping a performance of the First Sonata that's essentially lyrical and poetic. She doesn't dominate, mind. The booklet-notes make much of the fact that Helmchen and Hecker are husband and wife, but this is real duo playing, with each player stepping

forwards or conceding the musical argument without any grandstanding. That pays rich dividends in the more extrovert and fantastical Second Sonata (a sister work, in spirit, to the Third Symphony). Helmchen's majestic swell of sound in the centre of the *Adagio affettuoso* makes as much musical and colouristic sense as Hecker's forceful pizzicatos.

Any new recording of these two sonatas is up against competition ranging from du Pré and Barenboim to Alban Gerhardt and Markus Groh, and 53 minutes of music is not exactly generous (others offer Brahms transcriptions or Schumann cello music). But if you're after a thoughtful and musicianly pairing of these two works alone, you won't be disappointed. **Richard Bratby**

Dowland

Lachrimae, or Seaven Teares

Phantasm with **Elizabeth Kenny** lute Linn (F) CKD527 (57' • DDD)



How to describe Dowland's *Lachrimae, or Seaven Teares*? Seven pavans for five-part viol consort with lute, each a subtle transformation of the pavan known in its song version as 'Flow my tears', would be a start, but hardly does justice to its patient flow of exquisitely drawn and closely summoned emotion. These are not 'division' variations but a sequence of new pieces, each related to its companions by the falling motif that opens the song but also by numerous significant cross-references between them. In Laurence Dreyfus's words, they are 'an extended process of reflection on a poetic-musical theme'.

Phantasm's performances are totally convincing and absorbing. Drawing richly on their depth, intensity and homogeneity of tone, their acuity to the music's ever-active emotional flux leaves them unafraid to use forceful gestures of articulation and dynamics to make a point. This keen



Phantasm in performance: the viol group has recorded Dowland's *Lachrimae* for Linn with lutenist Elizabeth Kenny

awareness of the music's power extends to their performances of the 14 other pieces Dowland included in his *Lachrimae* publication, most of which are arrangements of his own songs and dances. But while many are light-hearted, short and familiar, nothing is routine in Phantasm's hands. *Semper Dowland semper Dolens* (rather more in the mould of the seven pavans) ends in crushing silence, *The King of Denmark's Galliard* is proud of its manly power, while *The Earl of Essex his Galliard* or *Mr George Whitehead his Alman* really rock with what Dreyfus defines as rhythmic 'jumps' and 'landings'. Even the timings of the gaps between pieces are part of the act, carefully judged to create effective groupings and segues.

The CD is beautifully presented, with readable and insightful booklet articles by Dreyfus and Elizabeth Kenny. Dowland characterised his seven pavans as 'passionate', and one can sense the true passion of Dreyfus and his performers in what has all the hallmarks of a classic recording.

Lindsay Kemp

Finnissy

Beat Generation Ballads. First Political Agenda

Philip Thomas pf

Huddersfield Contemporary Records Ⓛ HCR11CD
(69' • DDD)

Finnissy

'Singular Voices'

Beuk o' Newcastle Sangs^a. Lord Melbourne^a.
Same as we. Song 1. Song 11^b. Song 14. Song 15.
Song 16

Clare Lesser sop^{ab}Carl Rosman cl^aDavid Lesser pf
Métier Ⓛ MSV28557 (63' • DDD • T/b)



The writer Iain Sinclair once told me in an interview that Beat culture provided him with a very necessary escape route from what he termed the 'inward-looking English novel' of the late 1950s: 'Jack Kerouac is totally open-ended – not going anywhere necessarily in terms of narrative plot, not resolving anything,' he said. Michael Finnissy, 70 this year, immersed himself in Charles Ives, Allen Ginsberg, John Cage and free jazz to find his artistic feet during that same era, and his 2014 solo piano work *Beat Generation Ballads* plays itself out in the overlaps between culture and counterculture.

Consigning narrative plots and their correspondingly neat resolutions to the garbage can of history is one way to question the status quo and, a typical structural gambit for Finnissy, the five sections of *Beat*

Generation Ballads download as a digressive tangle of cultural reference points. Finnissy writes his own history into the music, too. The opening section, 'Lost But Not Lost', was composed when he was 16 as background music for what is coyly described as a friend's 'certificate X' film; the big surprise, though, is that Finnissy's mature voice is already in place.

As subsequent sections proceed, his stylistic catchment is characteristically broad: shavings of material from sources including Bach, Beethoven, Webern and the Bill Evans Trio (with its harmonically outré bassist Scott LaFaro) are all variously put under the microscope, re-examined compositionally, cross-fertilised and held within frames of contemplative silence. In the 35-minute final section, 'Veränderungen', Finnissy spins threads from all that has gone before into a fragmenting labyrinth. But, despite the intensity of febrile purpose and concentration, nothing much goes anywhere. Instead, listeners are locked into the moment while the music retains its wide-angled panorama, a paradox that pianist Philip Thomas does nothing to resolve as he keeps the music on the tightest structural leash. The companion piece, *First Political Agenda*, concerns its turbulent structures with the political and cultural disorientation of the 1990s: a prime minister adored and despised in



'Mellow and musical performances': Transports Publics explore the work of Anthony Poole on their new disc

equal measure is deposed and football tournaments popularise grand opera.

Clare Lesser's 'Singular Voices' disc follows a similar career trajectory: the early *Song 1*, *Song 11*, *Song 15* and *Song 16*, written between 1966 and 1976, are heard alongside *Lord Melbourne* (1980) and *Beuk o' Newcassel Sangs* (1988). The later pieces find Finnissy resculpting folksy diatonicism, microtones stretching melodic intervals. The songs, performed here with considerable grace, are studies in extended line as long, lithe melodies crumple into obsessive detail and undertake obsessive detours – the Beat goes on, music truly on the road.

Philip Clark

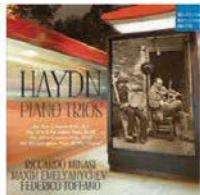
Haydn

Piano Trios - No 5, HobXV/1; No 13, HobXV/38; No 26, HobXV/13; No 39, 'Gypsy', HobXV/25

Riccardo Minasi vn Federico Toffano vc

Maxim Emelyanychev fp

Deutsche Harmonia Mundi **88875 17878-2** (61' • DDD)



Eighteenth-century keyboard trios were regularly billed as 'sonatas for the

harpsichord or fortepiano, with the accompaniment of violin and violoncello'. You would hardly guess that pecking order from these performances. If you've heard Riccardo Minasi's Baroque performances you'll know that he is no shrinking violet. His playing here is as lively and inventive as you'd expect. Yet time and again he upstages Maxim Emelyanychev's fortepiano – say, at the opening of the early G minor Trio (No 5), where the touches of violin countermelody virtually swamp the principal line in the keyboard.

The prime problem is the close recording of the violin in an ultra-resonant acoustic. Even allowing for that, you suspect that Minasi is on a mission to elevate the violin's role in Haydn's trios, dominating at the slightest provocation, and, as recorded, employing a much wider dynamic range than the reproduction Anton Walter fortepiano can muster. The results can be exciting, as when Minasi lets rip in the finale of the otherwise innocuous B flat Trio (No 13), enthusiastically abetted by the cello. Too often, though, the ear is distracted by over-intrusive accompanying figuration, not least in the musing *Adagio* of the *Gypsy* Trio.

While I never quite adjusted to the balance, especially when it mutes Emelyanychev's delicately inflected lines in

the slower music, it's hard to deny the energy and devil-may-care exuberance of these violin-led performances. Exploiting the percussive, astringent potential of period instruments, the players attack the Minuet and finale of the G minor Trio with a vehemence that would not be out of place in early Beethoven. Impetuous (occasionally rushed) rhythms and aggressively pounding accents likewise rule in the triple-time finale of the C minor Trio (No 26). Predictably, too, the 'Rondo, in the Gipsies' style', as Haydn dubbed it, lives on a knife-edge, with Minasi morphing into the most flamboyant of Hungarian fiddlers. **Richard Wigmore**

Mozart

'Mozart With Friends'

Trio, 'Kegelstatt', K498. Violin Sonatas - No 9, K14; No 15, K30. Duo, K423. Modulating Prelude, Kdeest. London Sketchbook, K15 - excs

Nils Mönkemeyer va with Sabine Meyer cl

Julia Fischer vn William Youn pf

Sony Classical **88985 30541-2** (76' • DDD)



Mozart's penchant for lower-voiced instruments found one of its finest chamber

outlets in the *Kegelstatt* Trio, K498, supposedly composed during a game of skittles. One must imagine that 18th-century Viennese skittles was a far less raucous and beery affair than today's game, given the melancholy cast of this wonderful and still too little-appreciated work.

And what a cast of players to record it. Viola player Nils Mönkemeyer's name might be in the biggest print on the CD cover but his regular chamber partner and Mozart specialist William Youn is at the piano and the clarinet part is taken by none other than Sabine Meyer. So this is naturally a performance notable for the close listening and fast reaction between the trio. Perhaps Mönkemeyer's viola is spotlit just slightly in the sound picture – but then, it is his project, and the range of sounds he draws from his instrument is never less than compelling, and is matched by Meyer's mellifluous clarinet and Youn's subtle touch.

The track-list from here on in might give the impression of diminishing returns: a couple of early violin sonatas, arrangements from the 'London Sketchbook' and one of the violin-and-viola duos Mozart composed to help his Salzburg colleague Michael Haydn out of a tight spot. But appearances are misleading and the myriad charms of these pieces – shallower, of course, than the *Kegelstatt* but no less finely wrought – are beautifully illuminated by these players, with violinist Julia Fischer guesting in the Duo and one of the sketchbook arrangements.

The *Kegelstatt* should be in every collection and this recording will be found to be as good as any. The earlier works into whose context it is placed fit very nearly perfectly to provide an hour and a quarter of pure Mozartian pleasure. **David Thrasher**

Pool

Alman. Chacone. Courante. Division Ayrs – I; III; IV; V; VI. Division to a Ground. A Division upon a Ground Basse. Fantasia. Saraband. A Second Division upon a Ground Basse.

Sonata a 3. St Justinas

Transports Publics

Musica Ficta  MF8023 (68' • DDD)



Anthony Poole (c1629–1692) is an obscure composer, no doubt of that. The catalogue of his works runs to over 300 entries, yet precisely two of them appeared in print in his lifetime, and only a handful have appeared on disc to date. Listening to this first-ever release entirely devoted to him – a cross-section of his output for various combinations of one or two violins or viols

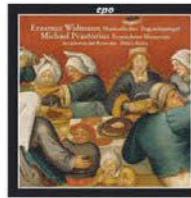
and continuo – it would be hard to claim him as a forgotten genius, but they are sound enough and there is indeed a wistful pleasure to be had from them. Poole was a viol-playing Catholic from Derbyshire who left for Flanders as a boy to be educated by the Jesuits; after a spell in Rome he returned to the Low Countries to teach music in his old school, where most of this music was probably written.

The music reflects his travels, consisting of English-style ayrs and divisions (or variations), a French dance suite and even a bang-up-to-date Italianate violin sonata and ciaccona. Knowledge of the circumstances of Poole's life, however, is enough to colour one's listening with a pervading impression of an Englishman soaking up the musical benefits of his travels but also perhaps finding in music – sometimes cool, sometimes working up to a passion – a consolation for years of exile from a land where the viol was still respected. That biographical shading, however much it might be an imagined one, gives this music a gentle sympathetic pull equivalent to that of the music of soldier/viol player Tobias Hume.

Transports Publics give mellow and musical performances in accordance with this mood, varying the scoring with taste and imagination. The inclusion of virginals and hammer dulcimer (who even have a beautiful duet together) are especially happy choices, while Thomas Baete's bass viol and Annelies Decock's violin have elegance and character. A touching encounter. **Lindsay Kemp**

Praetorius · E Widmann

Praetorius *Terpsichore Musarum*
E Widmann *Musicalischer Tugendspiegel*
Accademia del Ricercare / Pietro Busca
CPO  CPO777 608-2 (57' • DDD)



If Michael Praetorius's music has been widely anthologised, the same is not true of his close contemporary, Erasmus Widmann, who outlived Praetorius by a dozen years. His *Musicalischer Tugendspiegel* appeared in 1613, just one year after Praetorius's *Terpsichore musarum*, the two publications making up the totality of this recital. In this case, the greater share of the programme goes to the lesser-known composer. Widmann's charming habit of affixing female names to his dance pieces (Helena, Foelicitas, Magdalena, Sybilla, Regina and so on) prefigures the occasional practice of later periods.

IN THE STUDIO

An inside view of who's before the mics and what they're recording

• Bel canto from Opera Rara

The specialist label is recording Rossini's *Semiramide* with a cast including **Albina Shagimuratova** (Semiramide, pictured) and **Javier Camarena** (Idreno) alongside **Mark Elder** and the **Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment** in the week before the same forces take the work to the BBC Proms on September 4. In May the company recorded Bellini's *Adelson e Salvini* with the **BBC Symphony Orchestra** under **Daniele Rustioni**. Both are due for release in 2017: the Bellini in the spring, the Rossini in the autumn.



• Freire's first solo Brahms

Nelson Freire has recorded a selection of solo Brahms for Decca, featuring the Third Sonata, the Op 79 Rhapsodies and a selection of Intermezzos. The release date is yet to be confirmed.

• Alpha Classics news

Polish conductor **Krzysztof Urbański** has recorded Dvořák's *New World Symphony* and Strauss's *Ein Heldenleben* with the **NDR ElbPhilharmonie Orchestra** for the French label. The album is due out in January. **Giovanni Antonini** and **Il Giardino Armonico** recorded the fourth volume of their Haydn cycle, coupling Symphonies Nos 12, 60 and 70 with Cimarosa's *Il maestro di cappella*, for release next year. The mezzo **Kate Lindsey**, a new signing for the label, has recorded a disc of Weill, Zemlinsky, Korngold and Alma Mahler with pianist **Baptiste Trotignon** – best-known as a jazz performer – also due out in 2017.

• Stanford Preludes from Hyperion

The pianist **Sam Heywood** has just recorded his second disc for the British label at St Silas the Martyr in London's Kentish Town. It will feature selections from Stanford's Preludes, Opp 163 and 179, and is due for release in early 2017.



Recording Riley: the Ragazze Quartet and Slagwerk Den Haag perform the composer's *In C* on a new disc for Channel Classics

In fact, the majority of the pieces recorded here are dance music, something that is still relatively rare on recordings of this period. If this is undemanding music – one dance begins to sound much like another, especially in Widmann's case, it must be said – the variegated approach to scoring keeps the listener guessing. But that variety flatters to deceive: the frequent chopping and changing (sometimes within the same section of a given dance) betokens a degree of micro-management by the ensemble director. This seems out of place in such obviously functional music, which was surely intended to be performed with minimal preparation (if any). The selections from *Terpsichore* have more substance about them but the suggestion of colours pasted on (albeit lovely ones) makes an otherwise pleasant recital seem curiously old-fashioned. **Fabrice Fitch**

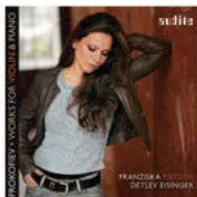
Prokofiev

Violin Sonatas – No 1, Op 80; No 2, Op 94a.

Five Melodies, Op 35b

Franziska Pietsch vn Detlev Eisinger pf

Audite © AUDITE97 722 (68' • DDD)



It is tempting, for simplicity's sake, to describe Prokofiev's violin sonatas as polar

opposites – at least in terms of mood. On the one hand you have the dark, ghostly First, often viewed as a lament for Stalin's victims. On the other there's the optimistic Second, packed with sun-soaked lyricism. But both works were written in the 1940s USSR, not long after the Great Terror, and share certain emotional strands. There's a danger, in outlining the differences between them, of overlooking their commonalities.

Happily, it's a danger that Franziska Pietsch and Detlev Eisinger both avert. This German duo bend over backwards to inject zest and propulsion into both works. Equally, they recognise that a certain acidity, even in the most lyrical, dreaming of passages, never lurks far from the surface. What emerges is a fully fleshed-out picture, simultaneously uplifting and unnerving, in which these sonatas become part of a coherent whole.

Yet their distinctive colours remain intact. Pietsch has a way of leaching the blood from her bow strokes that perfectly captures the First Sonata's shadowy atmosphere. Just listen to the opening movement's glissandos, which Prokofiev described as 'a wind in a graveyard'. Then, in the opening of the Second Sonata, her tone takes on an aching sweetness, underlined by Eisinger's spider-silk touch.

Their big problem is Alina Ibragimova. Her outstanding 2014 recording with pianist

Steven Osborne is still too recent a memory and it's hard, during the First Sonata's spiky second movement or the Second Sonata's fierce finale, not to long for her no-holds-barred approach. And it's hard, in the alternately earthy and ethereal *Five Melodies*, which round out the disc, not to acknowledge that Ibragimova brings even more contrast to these works. Still, there's plenty to value here: a *Lento* of dreaming wistfulness; an *Animato* full of punch.

Pietsch, who was brought up in Communist East Germany, claims an affinity with Prokofiev's music. This release neatly makes her point. **Hannah Nepil**

Selected comparison – coupled as above:

Ibragimova, Osborne (8/14) (HYPE) CDA67514

Riley

'Four Four Three'

In C. Sunrise of the Planetary Dream Collector

Ragazze Quartet; Slagwerk Den Haag; Kapok

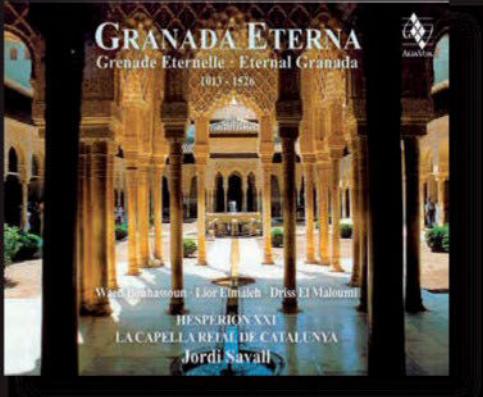
Channel Classics © CCS37816 (57' • DDD)



Terry Riley's proto-minimalist classic *In C* is ordinarily launched via a punched out high-C pulse on a keyboard, a rallying cry around which instrumentalists begin the serious business of feeling, and indeed

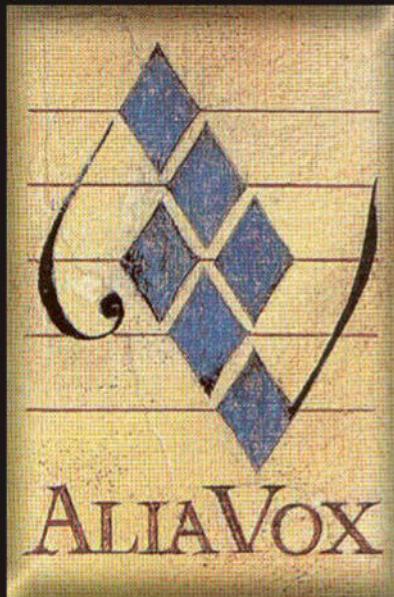
ALIAVOX

GRANADA ETERNA

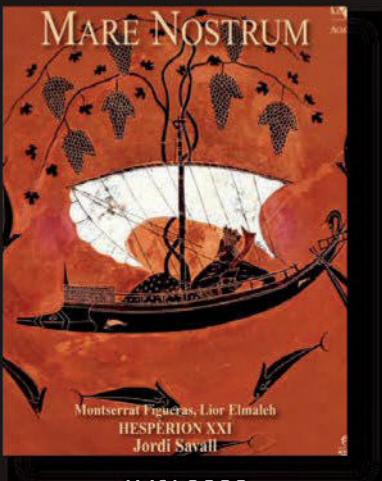


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thinking, their way through Riley's mosaic of 53 melodic fragments. But this performance by the combined forces of the Ragazze String Quartet and percussion group Slagwerk Den Haag offers a radical alternative – the pulse is discreetly shunted towards the background, utterly charming the senses with an often delicate mechanism of light pizzicato strings and mallet percussion.

Clearly, this vision of *In C* is a world away from Riley's own 1968 recording, where multitracked woodwind, brass and percussion (with Riley himself especially prominent on saxophone) generated a rough-diamond heterophony not too far removed from the free-jazz energies of John Coltrane's landmark large ensemble album *Ascension*. Everything in this new version is entirely within Riley's rules (musicians move through the sequence at will, judging how the next module might shape and/or transform the enveloping mass of sound), but it's a performance that also raises some pertinent philosophical questions.

My senses sniff a degree of pre-performance planning. When, around 22'20", the pulse melts into a wash of string and bowed vibraphone harmonics, before it is picked up again as a treading-water bass-line by pizzicato cello, the intentionality is obvious. There's nothing to indicate that musicians *can't* pre-plan. But *In C*'s USP was always Riley's invitation to escape the strict narrative of a score, allowing players to determine forward impetus through careful listening – reading the moment rather than the notes.

But I mustn't be overly ideological. This performance deals up moments of sheer magic; for example at 10'50" where the initial ensemble chatter narrows into a chirpy violin riff around which flinty string pizzicatos and clanging metal percussion spin; or the increasingly insistent groove that steers the music towards its end point. *Sunrise of the Planetary Dream Collector*, written originally for the Kronos Quartet, is reimagined here for the Ragazze Quartet and jazz trio Kapok as a minimalist lollipop – with grooves reminiscent of 1970s jazz/rock fusion group Weather Report, and a corker of a climactic drum solo.

Philip Clark

M Simpson

Night Music^a. *Ariel*^b. *Barkham Fantasy*^c. *Echoes and Embers*^d. *Lov(escape)*^e. *Un regalo*^f. *Windflower*^g. *Nur Musik*^h.
^aNicholas Daniel, ^bJonathan Small ^cobs ^dMark Simpson ^eLeonard Elschenbroich, ^fGuy Johnston ^gVCS ^hIan Buckle, ⁱAlexei Grynyuk, ^jVíkingur Ólafsson, ^kRichard Uttley ^lpfs ^mMercury

Quartet; ^hEnsemble 10/10 / Clark Rundell

NMC ^l NMCD225 (75' • DDD)



Mark Simpson has said that extramusical ideas or narrative structures help his music 'flow'

more easily. The only work on this collection of chamber and instrumental pieces dating from 2006 to 2014 that doesn't have some form of non-musical starting point is *Nur Musik* ('Just music'), written for the RLPO's 10/10 Ensemble in 2008 when Simpson was only just emerging from his teens.

You can hear the difference. I can, at least. Simpson has an awful lot of music inside him and plenteous discipline when it comes to writing it down. *Nur Musik* – the biggest score here but not the longest – is intentionally 'dense, dark and murky' at its outset, but that only throws into focus how lucid the composer is when fired by a story or distinct atmosphere. Perhaps that has honed his ability to keep protagonists (instruments) out of each other's way. His use of space and silence is notable, as are his gift for melody (check *Night Music*, 2014), his ability to ratchet up drama and his refreshing lack of inhibition in reaching for orthodoxies of style or tonality. Some composers might consider the clarinet-writing around 8'00" in *Echoes and Embers* (2012) too vernacular or inelegant; I love its grit.

However adept Simpson is at hitting upon something unusually ear-catching or fertile, rarely does he dwell on or overwork it. Examples of that lie within *Ariel* (2009), a response to Sylvia Plath's minatory poetry collection of the same name and, to my ears, the standout piece here. It will be interesting to hear how Simpson hones these clear but perhaps jumpy and ever-so-slightly unsettled elements of a compositional voice in the coming years; you might already hear that more distinctively than I do. Either way, this is high-quality music. And in case you need reminding, Simpson can play that clarinet too. Andrew Mellor

Vierne

Piano Quintet, Op 42^a.

Spleens et détresses, Op 38^b

^bAnaïk Morel ^{mez} ^aMüza Rubackyté ^{pf}

^aTerpsycordes Quartet

Brilliant Classics ^l 95367 (67' • DDD)

Vierne

'Concert-Centenaire II'

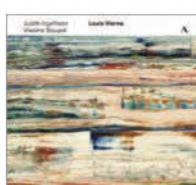
Violin Sonata, Op 23^a. Piano Quintet, Op 42^b

^{ab}Judith Ingolfsson, ^bRebecca Li ^{vns}

^bStefan Fehlandt ^{va} ^bStephan Forck ^{vc}

^{ab}Vladimir Stoupel ^{pf}

Accentus ^l ACC303712 (76' • DDD)



Vierne endured an unfairly troubous life: he was born nearly blind; both his wife and subsequent partner left him; he underwent painful operations, first to one of his legs, then (for four years) to his eyes; he nearly died from typhoid; was passed over for prestigious appointments; and lost two of his three children, one of them killed during the First World War along with his beloved brother René, who was vaporised by a direct hit from a shell.

Unsurprisingly, one does not turn to Vierne for light-hearted Gallic banter, though his organ music, the genre with which he is most readily identified, rarely reflects his private suffering, unlike his chamber music. While it does this without ever descending into self-pity, almost the whole of the Brilliant Classics disc is informed by grief and desolation. The 10 songs of his Op 38 *Spleens et détresses*, written in 1917, are settings of poems by Verlaine. In making this selection, David Moncur's booklet-note tells us, Vierne recalled 'a wordless encounter with the poet which had taken place 20 years before in the organ loft of Saint-Sulpice when Verlaine "fixed [him] with a look in which could be read absolute despair"'. Mezzo Anaïk Morel invests Vierne's settings with colour and passion (and, in 'Sapho', something approaching ecstasy), aided by the Lithuanian pianist Müza Rubackyté's characterful accompaniment. It's a recording much to be preferred to this writer's one previous encounter with the cycle some years ago on the Deux-Elles label featuring the monochrome soprano of Rachel Santesso and poor Roger Vignoles sentenced to play in what sounds like an empty swimming pool some distance away.

Into the Piano Quintet, composed in the same year, Vierne poured his anguish at the loss of his eldest son Jacques, killed in action at the age of 17. Personal torment produced, in purely musical terms, a masterpiece of the genre, 'one of the most remarkable works,' argues Moncur, 'to be created in response to the slaughter of the First World War'. It is closely modelled on Franck's Quintet, written in cyclical form. All three



The 12 Cellists of the Berlin Philharmonic bring 'love, flair and stellar virtuosity' to a disc of tangos on Sony Classical

movements are powerfully intense and emotional. Rubackyté and the Terpsyndes Quartet respond with vigour and sensitivity in a recording that matches other fine accounts (first among them Stephen Coombs and the Chilingirian Quartet on Hyperion). I marginally prefer theirs to the other new recording of the quintet on Accentus, where the first movement is less fiercely argued and the recorded sound does not have the same rewarding depth. However, Accentus's coupling is Vierne's earlier (1905-06) Violin Sonata – a commission, like the sonatas by Franck and Lekeu, from the great Eugène Ysaÿe. The experienced duo of Judith Ingolfsson and Vladimir Stoupel play this with commanding authority, so your choice between the two discs can justifiably be made purely on personal repertoire preference. **Jeremy Nicholas**

'Hora Cero'

Carli La Diquera. Para Oswaldo Tarantino
Piazzolla Escualo. Doe de amor. Calambre.
 Lunfardo. Pedro y Pedro. Decarísimo. Soledad.
 Revirado. Libertango. Buenos Aires hora cero.
 Clienta. Tres Minutos con la Realidad **Salgán**

A Don Agustín Bardí **Stafano** Milonguita
The 12 Cellists of the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra
 Sony Classical ④ 88875 14346-2 (69' • DDD)



The 12 Cellists of the Berlin Philharmonic play tangos: you just know it's going to sound gorgeous, and it does. Jump straight in on track 7, Piazzolla's *Pedro y Pedro* arranged (like most of the pieces here) by one of the players, David Riniker. Massed cellos swooning in close harmony, sweet as molasses and recorded in warm sound. Isn't that exactly what you'd want from a disc like this? No question, but over 68 minutes? No fear: skip forwards to the title track, Harold Noben's eight-minute transcription of *Buenos Aires hora cero*. It's like something by Ligeti: a fantastic nocturnal tone poem of whispered *sul ponticello* scratching and rustling – and is that a distant police siren?

If it was nothing else, this disc would be a spectacular demonstration of the sounds and colours that 12 cellos can produce in

the hands of players of this calibre. From whistling harmonics to rhythms tapped out on the wood of the instruments, there's hardly a technique that isn't deployed here, in the service of music that has apparently become something of a passion for the 12 Cellists. Piazzolla predominates, and there's a good sprinkling of standards – *Lunfardo*, *Libertango*, *Decarísimo* – but it's far from a hackneyed selection, and lighter numbers by less familiar tangueros break up the sheer intensity of unrelieved Piazzolla.

It's all done with love, rhythmic flair and stellar virtuosity: listen to the devil-may-care swing with which Bruno Delepeira skitters over his specially written solos in *Tres Minutos con la Realidad*. If I've a reservation, it's that maybe an *Oblivion* or an *Adiós Nonino* would have been nice – there's so much rhythmic energy in these pieces that the Cellists never quite stretch out and sing. Otherwise: wow. **Richard Bratby**

'Live from Buenos Aires'

Bartók Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion^a
Debussy En blanc et noir **Schumann** Six
 Canonic Etudes, Op 56 (arr Debussy)

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

BAROQUE REWORKINGS AND REDISCOVERIES

Charlotte Gardner embarks on a grand tour around the music of the European Baroque with a selection of new recordings reframing the familiar and unfamiliar



'Showstopping virtuosity and singing conviction: Simon Borutzki offers Bach 'all'italiano' on Klanglogo

With the plethora of Baroque recordings hitting the shelves each month from a constantly growing roster of top-drawer Baroque ensembles and soloists, the question of how to make one's disc stand out is pressing as never before. Of course, there's the time-honoured strategy of unearthing forgotten composers or works, but the premiere recording card isn't looking quite so fresh these days given that everyone's at it. As a result, it's illuminating concept discs that tend to provoke the most excitement in me these days – programmes that raise thoughtful comparisons through cleverly drawn thematic threads. So for me this clutch of new releases is conceptually right on the money: all recorded in churches and focusing in their individual ways on the composer-to-composer influencings and borrowings which shaped the development of forms such as the sonata and concerto.

To begin in Italy, where it all began, **Corelli Bolognese** sees Musica Antiqua Latina tap into Corelli's indebtedness to the city of Bologna, where he spent four formative years of violin training before moving on to Rome, presenting three of his Rome-composed trio sonatas

within the context of trios by Bolognese composers such as Bassani and Vitali. Nice programming touches include placing Corelli's remarkable Op 2 No 12 *Ciaccona* immediately after an earlier one by Cazzati, the latter's lustily strumming Baroque guitar colourfully demonstrating Corelli's later formalisation of such folk-rooted influences. Employment of the full gamut of choral continuo instrument options makes for maximum timbral interest across the programme, the harpsichord, organ, Baroque guitar and theorbo all getting a look-in. In fact, the continuo group often sound at the front of the recording balance, although not to the detriment of one's enjoyment of the bewitchingly precise and sweet-toned duetting from violinists Paolo Perrone and Gabriele Politi. Equally, when released from the bass-line, cellist and group founder Giordano Antonelli also serves up virtuoso gold.

The disc's one weak spot is its booklet-notes' scant mention of the links between Corelli and his disc-fellows, so Musica Antiqua Latina could learn a thing or two from the Cöln Barockorchester, who in recent years have been developing a name as much for their programming as for their

actual performances. **Towards Heaven** is no exception, being a conceptually lucid selection of French and German works, often programmatically titled, which acknowledge the harshness of earthly life while gazing heavenwards. All are performed with bright and stylish *joie de vivre*. Italian influence comes by way of a sonata and concerto grosso from Corelli-influenced Georg Muffat; Elisabeth-Claude Jacquet de la Guerre and Telemann also feature; while a Carl Rosier oboe-and-strings sonata shines from a programming angle, little-known as Rosier now is. It's in this latter piece that the acoustic of Honrath's Evangelische Kirche suddenly asserts itself, thanks to the wide positioning of the oboe: it works perfectly well but it does take some ear adjustment, making one wonder whether the instrument's sudden presence in an otherwise stringy programme had the engineers scratching their heads.

Conversed Monologue is the *Fantasticus* trio's debut recording as an expanded group, *Fantasticus XL*. Their programme uses three early French and German concertos, one for each original trio member, to illustrate how composers beyond Italy reimagined the Vivaldian concerto in their own national styles. Gambist Robert Smith kicks things off with Graun's C major *Viola da gamba Concerto*, his solo lines smoothly elegant but also projecting a huge sense of fun and spirit, which is matched by the orchestra. Of the three, Leclair's *Violin Concerto* Op 10 in G minor comes off the least well, simply because the rather astringent tone of Rie Kimura's instrument is an uncomfortable match for the solo part's ultra-high tessitura. Wilhelm Friedmann Bach's *Harpsichord Concerto* in F is a cracker, though, with the strikingly sweet, sonorous beauty Guillermo Brachetta extracts from his instrument likely to win over anyone still subscribing to the Beecham skeletons-copulating-on-a-tin-roof view of the harpsichord.

In contrast to bringing in an orchestra around three soloists, Monica Huggett has allotted the solo opportunities across her brilliantly varied seven-concerto-strong **Concerti Bizarri** programme to the existing

musicians of the Irish Baroque Orchestra, and the subsequent performances are unfailingly superlative. This is another programme demonstrating how German composers developed the Vivaldian style within their own national language; but this time Vivaldi's own double cello concerto, RV531, serves as a useful Italian point of comparison among offerings from Fasch, Telemann, Heinichen and Graupner. Five of the seven are multi-instrument concertos, and all but the Vivaldi feature at least one woodwind soloist. Keep your ears peeled in particular for the timbral magic of Graupner's Triple Concerto for flute d'amore, oboe d'amore and viola d'amore.

Perhaps the highest form of Baroque flattery was all-out copying, and with **Bach all'italiano** the young recorder player Simon Borutzki has taken this concept and expanded it further, selecting a clutch of JS Bach's harpsichord transcriptions of violin concertos by Vivaldi and Marcello, along with Bach's own *Italian Concerto* in F, BWV971, and with harpsichordist Clemens Flick rearranging them once more, this time as recorder concertos backed by a continuo ensemble consisting of cellist Lea Rahel Bader, lutenist Magnus Andersson and Flick on harpsichord and organ. The result is one of the most exciting albums to have landed on my desk all year, not just because of the way in which the various recorders' timbres lend further timbral spice to the untampered-with Italy-meets-Germany flavour of Bach's first arrangements, but because of the combination of showstopping virtuosity and singing conviction on display, obviously from Borutzki himself but also notably from Flick, who frequently shares the spotlight to delightful effect. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Various Cpsrs 'Corelli Bolognese'
Musica Antiqua Latina
DHM (F) 88875 17482-2



Various Cpsrs 'Towards Heaven'
Cölner Baroque Orch
Coviello (F) COV91603



Various Cpsrs 'Converso Monologue'
Fantasticus XL
Resonus (F) RES10166



Various Cpsrs 'Concerti Bizarri'
Irish Baroque Orch / Monica Huggett
Linn (F) CKD526



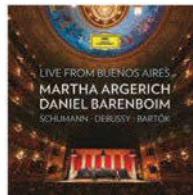
JS Bach 'Bach all'italiano'
Simon Borutzki et al
Klanglogo (F) KL1517

Martha Argerich, Daniel Barenboim pfs ^aPedro

Manuel Torrejón González, ^aLev Loftus perc

DG (F) 479 5563GH (59' • DDD)

Recorded live at the Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires,
July 26, 2015



In August 2014
Martha Argerich and
Daniel Barenboim
came together at the

Teatro Colón, Buenos Aires, for their first-ever joint concerts in their native city. EuroArts has already released a DVD of two of those events (7/16); this CD is a souvenir of another joint recital in the same series. It was clearly a memorable occasion – the silence at the end of Bartók's Sonata for Two Pianos and Percussion and the avalanche of cheers and applause that follows leave no doubt of that.

And generally, the disc captures the live atmosphere well, even if the balance in Schumann's *Six Canonic Studies* and Debussy's *En blanc et noir* is skewed in favour of the upper register. It would be nice to know who was playing which part. Much of the pleasure of the DVD came from watching a smiling Argerich (on second) tease at the parameters laid down by a saturnine Barenboim (on first), and I suspect it was the same here: that the bass-line wryly stalking the melody through the fourth Schumann study was Argerich and that the ringing, neon-lit fanfare that momentarily halts the first of Debussy's pieces was Barenboim. In any case, these are fresh, colourful readings; the Debussy is particularly vivid.

The Bartók, unfortunately, is a disappointment: not because of the pianists – who evoke *The Rite* in the central nocturne and build thunderous rolling climaxes through the first movement – but on account of the apologetic, distant-sounding percussion. More than anything, that makes this a disc for hardcore fans only. And judging from the booklet, which contains a gushing hagiography but no information about any of the music performed, that was always the intention. **Richard Bratby**

'The Lyrical Clarinet, Vol 2'

Chausson Andante et Allegro **Debussy** Petite
pièce **Field** Nocturnes – No 2; No 5; No 8

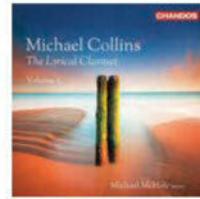
Françaix Tema con variazioni **Guastavino**

Clarinet Sonata **Massenet** *Thaïs* – Méditation

Ravel Pièce en forme de habanera **Schumann**
Fantasiestücke, Op 73

Michael Collins cl **Michael McHale** pf

Chandos (F) CHAN10901 (65' • DDD)



What's in a name?

Michael Collins's debut recital disc for EMI (9/92) was part of the label's Virtuosi series and opened with Schumann's Op 73 *Fantasiestücke*.

Now recording for Chandos, Collins has two recital series running. You might think the *Fantasiestücke* would qualify for 'The Virtuoso Clarinet', but instead it opens the second volume of 'The Lyrical Clarinet' instead. I'm slightly uneasy about these titles – surely we're not aiming for 'mood music' here? – but whatever it says on the tin, it's good news that Chandos is busily recording the UK's leading clarinettist in this repertoire.

The *Fantasiestücke* are a favourite recital opener with many a player. Gentle charm unfurls from each movement without exacting the clarinettist too much. Collins's approach has changed little from his EMI recording. He's a touch more expansive but his tone is still warm and rounded. Michael McHale is just as responsive as Kathryn Stott in the more fiery third movement.

Apart from the Schumann, this disc finds Collins wandering off the beaten track in search of repertoire in lyrical vein. Three John Field Nocturnes are scattered through the disc, all rippling piano accompaniments over which the clarinet floats without a cloud in the sky to block the moonbeams. The most substantial piece is the Sonata by the Argentinian composer Carlos Guastavino, sometimes known as 'the Schubert of the Pampas'. Collins handles the second movement's long phrases tenderly, while the Rondo finale, with its folksong theme, is delightfully sunny.

Chausson's *Andante et Allegro* offers contrasting movements, the *Allegro* allowing Collins to demonstrate nimble fingerwork and virtuoso upward leaps without any hint of a scramble. The 'Méditation' from Massenet's *Thaïs* is there as a tender lollipop. Indeed, France is well represented, with Ravel's slinky *Habanera* and Debussy's *Petite pièce*, written as a sight-reading test, joined by Jean Françaix, whose piece flicks and darts through a series of variations before its typically high-spirited, jokey *Prestissimo* finale.

Guastavino and Françaix's contributions were composed in the early 1970s – demonstrating, according to Roger Nichols's booklet-notes – 'that there was still a place for the lyrical clarinet'.

Mark Pullinger

Byron Janis

Jeremy Nicholas pays tribute to one of the great American pianists, 88 this year, who in some ways surpassed even his teacher the legendary Vladimir Horowitz

It's unlikely if you're given a name like Byron Janis that you will become a bus conductor or a farmer or a tax inspector. While you need not have swum the Hellespont (now the Dardanelles) or fought for Greek independence, there is something inherently glamorous about the name Byron, attached as it is in our subconscious to the image of the great Romantic poet. And in the 1950s and '60s there were few more glamorous pianists around than Byron Janis.

Of the myriad pianists dubbed 'a second Horowitz', he had the greatest claim to the title – and not just because he was Horowitz's first pupil and one of the very few people who ever studied with the great Russian. For many people, Janis brought the same high-octane thrill to many works that, paradoxically, his mentor never recorded: Rachmaninov's First and Second Concertos, Prokofiev's Third, Liszt's First and Second Concertos and *Totentanz*, and Strauss's *Burleske*, to name but a few of his finest discs (mainly for RCA and Mercury) conducted by such luminaries as Fritz Reiner, Charles Munch, Kirill Kondrashin and Antal Dorati. Even in repertoire that was 'owned' by Horowitz, Janis could equal and in some ways surpass him, as illustrated by the several recordings he made of Rachmaninov's Third Concerto. A YouTube clip of the third movement in a studio recording from the 1960s shows with what daring, accuracy, ease and confidence Janis played, and how his technique and keyboard address were completely different from Horowitz's.

Janis was born in 1928 in McKeesport, Pennsylvania, to a Polish-Russian family who had shortened their name of Yankilevitch to Yanks when they immigrated to America. By the time he was 15, his name had been changed from Byron Yanks to Byron Janis and again to

A YouTube clip from the 1960s shows with what daring, accuracy, ease and confidence Janis played

Byron Janis. At the age of eight his parents took him to New York to play for Josef and Rosina Lhévinne, who taught him for a while before passing him – because of their concert schedule – to Adele Marcus, with whom he studied for six years. But Janis's career very nearly did not happen at all: when he was 11 he accidentally pushed his left hand through a glass door, severing the tendons in the little finger, leaving it permanently numb.

Having made his orchestral debut with the NBC Symphony Orchestra at the age of 15 in Rachmaninov's Second Concerto, he played the same work shortly afterwards in Pittsburgh conducted by the 14-year-old Lorin Maazel. It was at this concert that Horowitz first heard him. Recognising a kindred spirit, he invited Janis to study with him in New York. These weekly lessons took place over three years, during which time Horowitz forbade him from studying with anyone else. The impressionable teenager lived and breathed Horowitz's inimitable style and sound. 'At that time,' Janis recalled, 'I did not realise what was happening. I was becoming a copy of Horowitz.'

In his disarmingly frank autobiography, *Chopin and Beyond: My Extraordinary Life in Music and the Paranormal* (2010), Janis reveals that he had an affair with Wanda Toscanini (Mrs Horowitz) and then married a sister of Clarissa Dickson Wright (famous in the UK as one of the celebrity TV chefs known as Two Fat Ladies). His second (and present) wife, Maria, is the daughter of Hollywood legend Gary Cooper.

When Janis was 20, Horowitz stopped his lessons and Janis embarked on a career as a touring virtuoso. In 1960 he became the first American to tour Russia on a cultural exchange, and during a second

DEFINING MOMENTS

• 1936 – Juilliard at the age of eight

Begins studies with the Lhévinne at Juilliard and then with their ex-student and assistant Adele Marcus

• 1943 – Orchestral debut aged 15

Orchestral debut playing Rachmaninov's Second Concerto with the NBC Symphony Orchestra

• 1944–48 – Lessons with a legend

Studies with Vladimir Horowitz

• 1948 – Rave reviews

Carnegie Hall debut: 'Not for a long time has this writer heard such a talent allied with the musicianship, the feeling, the intelligence and artistic balance of Byron Janis' *New York Times*

• 1960 & 1962 – Pioneering Russian tours

The first American to tour Russia on a cultural exchange

• 1973 – Disaster strikes

First signs of arthritis

THE ESSENTIAL RECORDING



Liszt *Totentanz*

Rachmaninov Piano Concerto No 1

Schumann Piano Concerto, Op 54

Byron Janis pf

Chicago Symphony Orchestra /

Fritz Reiner

Sony Originals



visit in 1962 he stunned his hosts by playing in one concert the Schumann Concerto, Rachmaninov's First and Prokofiev's Third, followed by an encore of the last movement of Tchaikovsky's First. At the height of his career in the late 1960s, he was playing more than 100 concerts a year. Janis's memoir, as well as detailing the many paranormal events he has experienced during his life, tells the story of how in 1967 he unearthed in a French chateau two previously unknown Chopin manuscripts in the composer's hand (the waltzes Op 18 and Op 70 No 1).

Then tragedy struck. By some cruel twist of fate, of the three great American pianists born in 1928, Leon Fleischer

and Gary Graffman lost the use of their right hands, and from 1973 onwards Janis began suffering from psoriatic arthritis in his hands and wrists. Although in considerable (and increasing) pain, he gallantly continued to play without the audience knowing of his condition. Operations, failed remedies, large doses of drugs and the fear of no longer being able to play led, understandably, to a long period of depression. Janis did not go public until 1985, after a concert at the White House. He recovered sufficiently to release two CDs, one in 1996 the other in 1998, and is now an ambassador for the Arthritis Foundation in the US. **G**

Instrumental



Harriet Smith listens to Elizabeth Joy Roe's new disc of Field Nocturnes:

'Everything is very thoughtful, and she can be delicate, too, in response to Field's filigree flights of fancy' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 64**



Patrick Rucker welcomes some early Argerich recordings:

'It is impossible to take issue with this calibre of Mozart-playing. Unalloyed pleasure is the only response' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 70**

JS Bach

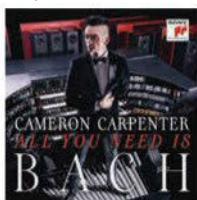
'All You Need is Bach'

All You Need is Bach/Invention No 8, BWV779^a. French Suite No 5, BWV816^a. Die Kunst der Fuge, BWV1080 - Contrapunctus IX^a. O Mensch, bewein dein' Sünde gross, BWV622. Passacaglia and Fugue, BWV582. Prelude and Fugue, BWV544. Trio Sonatas - No 1, BWV525; No 3, BWV527 (arr Carpenter)

Cameron Carpenter org

Sony Classical ② 88875 17826-2 (73' • DDD)

Played on the International Touring Organ



For those who enjoy the spectacle of breathtaking fingerwork and dazzling articulation, who marvel at impeccable accuracy at incredible speeds and who relish dazzling virtuosity irrespective of instrumental discipline, I cannot recommend this disc too highly. For those who enjoy the organ music of Bach, who marvel at the sound of a fine organ and who relish interpretations informed by style, musicality and interpretative coherence, I cannot reject this disc too strongly.

Cameron Carpenter is a brilliant showman and one of the great virtuosos of our time, but his love of spectacle and display of technical bravado seriously oversteps the mark here. Eager to demonstrate his International Touring Organ, a computerised electronic box of tricks which sounds every bit as hideous as it looks, he sheds every vestige of musical respectability in a bid to demonstrate it to the full. This reaches its appalling climax in the B minor Prelude and Fugue where, with changes of volume and tone colour just about every bar, we have a grotesque travesty of one of Bach's greatest organ creations. It could be argued that Carpenter is forcing us to rethink our approach to Bach, challenging us to look afresh at these pillars of the organ repertory. But this playing is so far removed from any widely accepted ideas of Bach interpretation that it comes across as

a mockery, devoid of taste, musical integrity or interpretative logic.

Occasionally – as in the E flat Trio Sonata (No 1) and certain movements of the *French Suite* – we get a glimpse of what might have been had he concentrated more on Bach's music than his own showmanship, but you only need listen to the dreadfully disfigured *Orgelbüchlein* prelude to realise that Carpenter's ideas on Bach have a long way to go before they should be aired in polite company.

Marc Rochester

JS Bach

Clavier-Übung III

Stephen Farr org

Resonus ② RES10120 (105' • DDD)

Played on the Metzler organ of Trinity College, Cambridge

JS Bach

Clavier-Übung III

James Johnstone org

Metronome ② METCD1094 (107' • DDD)

Played on the Joachim Wagner organ of Nidaros Cathedral, Trondheim



Bookended by the great Prelude and Fugue in E flat, the third part of the *Clavier-Übung* appeared in 1739 and still remains one of those Bach repositories admired largely by aficionados of the organ or those intrigued by its penetrating excursions into hymnody and, especially, the catechism in the so-called 'German organ Mass'. While Bach's previous published volumes consist of mature harpsichord works (including the six Partitas), as does the fourth with the *Goldberg Variations*, *Clavier-Übung III* is arguably the most resolutely resourceful expression of late-style Bach to be found.

Here we have two fine English players, both inaugurating their Bach recording

journeys with this pinnacle of the oeuvre in remarkably complementary ways. Indeed, the idea of an unfolding tapestry is what defines the best performances from Masaaki Suzuki, Leo van Doeselaar and Kay Johannsen, to name three. Each of them alights on Bach's calculated exhibition of where the chiseled treatment of old modal hymns and *galant* sensibility offer an ecstatic and magnetic pull into the heart of the chorales.

Stephen Farr takes a refreshingly direct approach, but it's never matter-of-fact. His opening 'ouverture' may initially seem short of sparks but his exquisite matching of registrations on the fine Metzler of Trinity Cambridge and wisely judged tempi reveal a compelling imagination and a hugely impressive musical armoury. This ranges from the embedded poetics of the soft-hue chorale preludes for manuals to the coruscatingly powerful *Kyrie, Gott Heiliger Geist* – almost unbearable as the chromatic close reveals the human's deepest cry for mercy – and the Gothic majesty of *Aus tiefer Not* with its grindingly severe double pedal. Farr decides against the kind of monumentality one usually hears; its granite truth is still effectively implicit. Of the more enigmatic pieces, Farr negotiates the canonic wonders of *Dies sind die heil'gen zehn Gebot* with tantalising allure and the Lombardic mysteries of *Vater unser* – a place where critics of Bach's antiquated complexity would have been checked by the calculatingly modern gestures.

James Johnstone thrusts us almost immediately from the opening Prelude into a bright world of urgent theatricality and rhythmic momentum. The immediacy of the Joachim Wagner organ in Trondheim in Norway (begun in the same year as Bach published this set) is balanced by Johnstone's fine ear for juxtaposing 'period' colour with 'à la mode' Baroque rhetoric and timing; this is not just fine organ-playing but top-drawer keyboard-playing from a musician who, when in the loft, thinks as harpsichordist, obbligatist and continuo player all at once.

If the melodic threads are less expressively shaped here than with Farr's



Stephen Farr offers a 'refreshingly direct approach' to Bach's Clavier-Übung III on the Metzler organ of Trinity College, Cambridge

easy lyricism – as you can hear in the superb trio on *Allein Gott* with its inverted double counterpoint – then Johnstone ingeniously imparts the sense that he's accompanying himself with clear and deliberately delineated roles. Equally, his grip on the architecture of the large-voiced pieces never fails to offer the listener a probing intellectual template, fortified by a commanding technical presence.

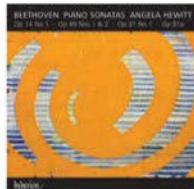
Johnstone brings regular intensity (the little *Fugghetta super Wir glauben* is an almost histrionic example) and an unusual blend of containment and stylistic flair to this extraordinary compendium of Bachian craft, not to mention effortless class in the rolling, concerto-like *Christ, unser Herr, zum Jordan kam*. Farr is no less profoundly engaged. His instincts for beauty and projecting the emotional 'core' without affectation are among the many virtues here. I wouldn't be without either in appreciating Bach's most elaborate publishing venture and wellspring of organ-playing invention.

Jonathan Freeman-Attwood

Beethoven

Piano Sonatas – No 9, Op 14 No 1; No 16, Op 31 No 1; No 19, Op 49 No 1; No 20, Op 49 No 2; No 26, 'Les adieux', Op 81a

Angela Hewitt pf
Hyperion © CDA68131 (75' • DDD)



Angela Hewitt leaves few stones unturned in projecting the linear specificity of Beethoven's style. In Op 31 No 1's first movement, for example, you'll rarely find the left-hand second subject and the sequential right-hand patterns so logically contoured. No doubt Hewitt's authority in Bach informs her sophisticated articulation of the *Adagio grazioso*'s elaborate ornaments (note her fastidiously calibrated trills), achieved with minimum pedal and maximum finger control. For my taste, Hewitt's *Allegretto* is a tad deliberate and fussy, whereas Jonathan Biss matches her intricate workmanship in faster, more humorous terms. Hewitt's subtle timbral distinctions between detached and sustained passages throughout Op 14 No 1 bring Beethoven's wonderful string quartet arrangement of this sonata to mind.

Hewitt lavishes similar care over the modest Op 49 sonatas. She brings a winsome lilt to No 1's finale which makes up for its sedate tempo. If she holds back in

No 2's *Allegro ma non troppo* (here I prefer François-Frédéric Guy's robust animation), her steadfast legato/détaché differentiation in the Menuetto is attractively deadpan.

One can hardly fault Hewitt's suave execution or her meticulous voice-leading and dynamic shadings in *Les adieux*'s first movement, although I miss the forward impetus and outward joy conveyed by Ivan Moravec and Solomon. Many pianists put the slow movement in freeze-frame but Hewitt treats it like the classical *Andante* it is, making expressive points through touch and colour. After pouncing into the Rondo's whirling introduction, she seemingly settles back when the movement's main theme commences. Yet her biting accents, strong left-hand presence and shapely downward scales assiduously gather momentum and drive. In other words, Hewitt is a sleek cougar next to Artur Schnabel's scruffy lion! As always, her annotations show her to be equally articulate and accessably erudite away from the keyboard. I look forward to her cycle's 10 remaining sonatas. **Jed Distler**

Op 31 No 1 – selected comparison:

Biss (3/14) (ONYX) ONYX4115

Op 49 – selected comparison:

Guy (4/12) (ZZT) ZZT304

Op 81a – selected comparisons:

Solomon (12/54^R) (EMI) 206102-2Moravec (1/96^R, 2/02^R) (SUPR) SU3580-2**Corbetta • De Visée**

'La Mascarade'

Corbetta Passacaille. Partie de Chaconne.

Sarabanda per la B. Caprice de Chaconne. Folie

De Visée Préludes - A minor; D minor.

Passacailles - B minor; D minor. Les Sylvains de

Mr Couperin. La Mascarade. Chaconnes -

A minor; B. La Muzette. Sarabande

Rolf Lislevand *baroque gtr/theo*

ECM New Series (481 1716 (48' • DDD)

De Visée

'Intimité et grandeur'

Pièces de théorbe - A; C; C minor; D minor;

E minor; F; G minor. Chaconne in A minor

Fred Jacobs *theo*

Metronome (METCD1090 (66' • DDD)



Baroque guitarists Francesco Corbetta and his pupil Robert de Visée were masters of chiaroscuro, of nuance, suggestion and – unintentionally – irony, exploiting the resources of their delicate instruments in intimate spaces to express the full grandeur of the monarchs they served. Yet their lives couldn't have been more different.

Corbetta (c1615–81), that great innovator and populariser of the five-course guitar, was born in Italy and worked there as well as in Spain, the Low Countries, England and finally France. The career of French-born multi-instrumentalist de Visée, 30 years Corbetta's junior, was wholly centred on the French court.

Their music makes extensive use of the typical French dance suite (which, incidentally, Corbetta helped 'codify'). But where Corbetta's work relies on a profusion of ornamentation, contrasting effects and the so-called 'mixed style' of strumming and plucking, de Visée's – at least for the theorbo – tends towards the melodic simplicity and grandiose utterance of Lully.

That's not to say one is superficial, the other serious; both exhibit charm and profundity in equal measure. But it takes a performer of the calibre of Baroque guitarist and theorbo player Rolf Lislevand fully to realise the synecdochal power of their music for modern ears.

On 'La Mascarade', Lislevand provocatively contrasts the music of Corbetta and de Visée not just by focusing on guitar pieces by the former and theorbo

pieces by the latter but by eschewing the suite proper in favour of (mostly) pairs of preludes or similar and chaconnes or similar. The effect is hypnotic, dazzling and even dizzying as Lislevand conjures up lost châteaux, parterres and the intrigues that took place therein through the merest flick of the right-hand wrist or finely judged fall of a left-hand finger. The resultant theatre of sound, resonant with percussive strumming, gales of trills, overlapping campanella scales and mournful *ports de voix* finds yet another analogue in the differences between the lightly built Baroque guitar and the large, long-necked theorbo.

With 'Intimité et grandeur', lutenist Fred Jacobs reaches the last in his superb three-volume survey of de Visée's works for theorbo. Interestingly, here he manages to combine many of the tonal qualities that characterise Lislevand's recording by using a French theorbo of relatively light construction. However, with an emphasis on the dance suite (Allemande, Courante, Sarabande, Gigue, etc) and transcriptions by de Visée of pieces by Lully, this is a very different listening experience. The result, however, is the same: fresh insights and striking revelations from music too often considered inconsequential when held up against that of later times.

William Yeoman**Field**

Complete Nocturnes

Elizabeth Joy Roe *pf*

Decca (478 9672 (86' • DDD)



Not one but two sets of Field nocturnes have come my way this month (Ewa

Pobłocka's period-instrument set is reviewed on page 68). That in itself is pretty remarkable, for these are, even today, more written about than recorded. The Korean-American pianist Elizabeth Joy Roe has previously recorded Britten and Barber concertos for Decca (5/15) but this is her first solo outing on the label. She writes passionately about the music in her booklet-note and has clearly done her research in terms of editions.

The danger of a disc devoted to the 18 Nocturnes is that, unlike Chopin's with their huge gamut of expression, Field's are altogether simpler in demeanour and so their range is inherently narrower. What they don't need is spacious tempi, which are the kiss of death, and one to which pianists such as Miceál O'Rourke succumb too readily. Roe is anxious at every turn to

make poetry from this music, and she has a suitably haloed sound. Everything is very thoughtful, and she can be delicate, too, in response to Field's filigree flights of fancy.

But, for all her refinement, she is simply too slow too much of the time. The first Nocturne, H24 in E flat major, sets the scene (Pobłocka by comparison finds a much greater sense of drama here). And again, in the second, H25 in C minor, it seems captivated by its own beauty, fatally lacking a sense of flow. It's a pity, for Roe clearly feels strongly about this music. But how much easier she would have made life if, for instance, in the miraculously lovely B flat major, H37, she'd allowed a little more ebb and flow, as Benjamin Frith does so effectively. Or the C major, H45, which sounds too self-consciously 'poetic'; notch the tempo up just a little and it becomes easier to maintain the melodic line and makes the octave-leap Gs less dominant, as Frith demonstrates. The E major Nocturne, H13, comes as a relief, Roe enjoying its sense of play, and she also finds much to bring out of the extended rhapsodic C major, H60. But overall I was left with a sense that there's much more to be brought out of this music than we find here. **Harriet Smith**

Selected comparisons:

O'Rourke (9/89) (CHAN) CHAN8719

Frith (2/00) (NAXO) 8 550761/2 (oas)

Heller

'Variations for Piano'

Variations on a Theme by Paganini, Op 1.

Variations brillante on a Polish Theme, Op 5.

Variations on a Theme by Beethoven, Op 133

Biliana Tzinlikova *pf*

Paladino (PMR0065 (64' • DDD)

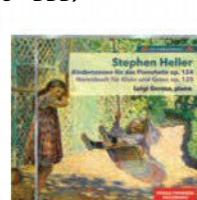
Heller

Kinderszenen für das Pianoforte, Op 124.

Notenbuch für Klein und Gross, Op 138

Luigi Gerosa *pf*

Dynamic (CDS7747 (73' • DDD)



Stephen Heller (1813–88) sits below the salt and on these showings at least he is unlikely to win a place at the top table any time soon. As early as the first edition of *Grove*, Edward Dannreuther complained of Heller's 'wearisome reiteration of some short phrase, without either development or attempt at attractive variety in treatment, which of late has grown into mannerism with him'.



Rolf Lislevand plays music by Francesco Corbetta and his pupil Robert de Visée on ECM

It's a view substantiated by Heller's interminable set of *Variations* on the theme of the slow movement of Beethoven's *Appassionata* Sonata – not to be confused with Heller's Op 130, another (and more compact) set of Beethoven variations using the theme of the 32 Variations in C minor, which some collectors might remember from a 1973 Genesis recording by Gerhard Puchelt. On and on they go, like guests who have overstayed their welcome and haven't noticed that their hosts are falling asleep. The 37 minutes and 45 seconds' length of the 21 variations is one thing but the succession of phenomenally dull ideas is another – dull, that is, with the exception of the finale, a witty and ingenious variation that pits the slow movement theme against a major key treatment of the sonata's finale.

The *Variations (not tremendously) brillantes on a Polish Theme* (1829) are the kind that myriad composers were churning out to entertain the Parisians at the time, and Heller's are particularly forgettable; the *Paganini Variations* (Heller's Op 1 from the same year) are not, *caveat emptor*, on the A minor violin Caprice but the jolly rondo theme of the First Violin Concerto. Herz or Kalkbrenner would have done it better and while the diligent Bulgarian pianist Biliana Tzinlikova is to

be commended for these premiere recordings, she is no Howard Shelley, a past master at transforming the second-rate into the first-rate.

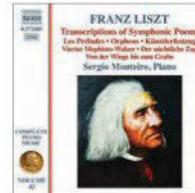
To hear the *echt* Heller, you must turn to the shorter genre pieces which made him so popular in the last 25 years of his life 'among the cultivated amateurs of England and France' (Grove again). The Italian Luigi Gerosa presents further premiere recordings in the form of *Kinderszenen*, 10 (rather than Schumann's 13) miniatures published in 1869. Perhaps if Heller had given them titles like their homonymous predecessor, instead of just tempo indications, they might have achieved greater acclaim because there are some particularly attractive and individual ideas in the collection. Gerosa makes a good case for their revival and follows them with 25 further brief character pieces (the shortest is 1'01", the longest 3'47") which he called *Notenbuch für Klein und Gross*, published in 1874. The titles he gives them reflect those of Schumann and Mendelssohn every bit as much as their musical language, but – as I implied at the beginning – there's none of their melodic genius. All the same, a decent recording which repertoire junkies will welcome. **Jeremy Nicholas**

Liszt

'Complete Piano Music, Vol 43 – Transcriptions of Symphonic Poems' Les préludes (arr Karl Klauser). Orpheus (arr Friedrich Spiro). Künstlerfestzug (second version). Von der Wiege bis zum Grabe. Zwei Episoden aus Lenaus Faust – Der nächtliche Zug (arr Robert Freund). Mephisto Waltz No 4

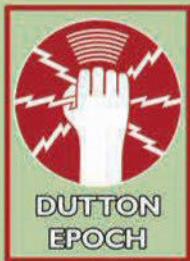
Sergio Monteiro pf

Naxos B 8 573485 (71' • DDD)



Since its inception in 1987, the Naxos Liszt series has released a number of superb recordings. The names Arnaldo Cohen, Jean Dubé, Giuseppe Andaloro, Leon McCawley, Ashley Wass and Alexandre Dossin are among those that come immediately to mind. There have been times, however, when one wished that Naxos held a tighter curatorial rein. The artistically commendable discs of William Wolfram, for instance, were hampered by poorly maintained pianos.

Volume 43 in the series is devoted to orchestral works transcribed by Liszt and others, played by Sergio Monteiro, the Brazilian-born pianist now active in the US,



DUTTON EPOCH NEW RELEASE



2016 commemorates 400 years since the death of William Shakespeare, and this release features Arthur Sullivan's complete incidental music for two of the Bard's best-known plays

ARTHUR SULLIVAN

Incidental music to Shakespeare's plays

The Tempest & *Macbeth**

Marmion Overture

BBC Concert ORCHESTRA

John Andrews (conductor)

Mary Bevan (soprano)

Fflur Wyn (soprano)

Simon Callow (speaker)

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This 2-CD set brings together for the first time Arthur Sullivan's complete incidental music to Shakespeare's *Macbeth* and *The Tempest* with his concert overture, *Marmion*. *The Tempest* was Sullivan's graduation work from the Leipzig Conservatoire, and its rapturous reception in London in 1862 launched his career. The *Macbeth* music comes from the other end of Sullivan's creative life. Commissioned by Henry Irving for his famous production at the Lyceum Theatre, it includes sublime melodic writing, ravishing orchestration (including the atmospheric use of two harps) and a dark dramatic energy. For both plays, Sullivan interwove music and text seamlessly – most impressively in the scenes between Macbeth and the Witches. Simon Callow's wonderful performance of Shakespeare's text makes it possible to appreciate how truly theatrical this music is. *Marmion* was composed after the epic poem by Walter Scott, which culminates in the Battle of Flodden Field. Until now, it has been heard only in a heavily abbreviated version. This recording restores the composer's original narrative structure, with sparkling playing from the BBC Concert Orchestra.

HAVERGAL BRIAN

Symphony No. 2 in E minor

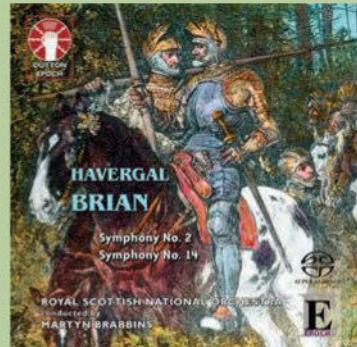
Symphony No. 14 in F minor*

ROYAL SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA

Martyn Brabbins (conductor)

* WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

CDLX 7330 ▶



Havergal Brian's Second Symphony (1930-31) is music on an epic scale. Partly inspired by Goethe's play *Götz von Berlichingen* and scored for a huge orchestra that includes two pianos, three timpanists and an astonishing sixteen horns, the score contains some of Brian's richest and most immediately appealing music. This revelatory performance by Brian stalwarts the Royal Scottish National Orchestra and conductor Martyn Brabbins is the first commercial recording to feature the full instrumental forces, as envisaged by the composer. This performance of Brian's Fourteenth Symphony (1959-60) is the first legitimate recording of the work to have been made. Completed when Brian was 84 years old and embarking on an astonishing Indian Summer of creativity that lasted until he was 92, the Fourteenth is more compact, but no less heroic in spirit: a complex single movement encompassing a kaleidoscopic range of moods and providing a perfect introduction to Brian's late style.



BENJAMIN DALE

Romance for Viola and Orchestra

REBECCA CLARKE

Viola Concerto

RICHARD WALTHEW

A Mosaic in Ten Pieces
(with Dedication)

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS
OF THE ORCHESTRAL VERSIONS

HARRY WALDO WARNER

Suite in D minor

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDING

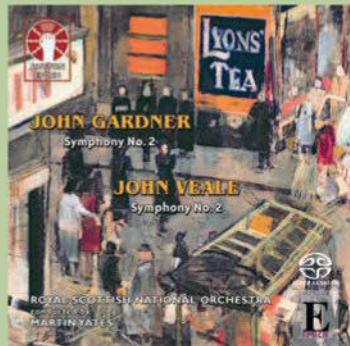
THE HALLÉ

Stephen Bell (conductor)

Sarah-Jane Bradley (viola)

◀ CDLX 7329

The Hallé and viola virtuoso Sarah-Jane Bradley present a programme of four tuneful and atmospheric scores by British composers of the early twentieth century. Benjamin Dale's large-scale *Romance* for viola and orchestra finds him at his most lyrical, while Canadian-born composer Ruth Lomon's orchestration of Rebecca Clarke's Viola Sonata is splendidly authentic, emphasising the romantic sensibility latent in Clarke's piano score. Richard Walthew orchestrated his delightful *Mosaic* – a succession of eleven encores originally for clarinet and piano – for the celebrated Lionel Tertis, and here Sarah-Jane Bradley revels in its lyrical charm. The *Suite in D minor* by composer, violist and founder member of the London String Quartet, Harry Waldo Warner, completes the programme, and Sarah-Jane Bradley and the Hallé project this substantial three-movement work with insight and panache.



JOHN GARDNER

Symphony No. 2 in E flat

JOHN VEALE

Symphony No. 2 in D minor

ROYAL SCOTTISH NATIONAL ORCHESTRA
Martin Yates (conductor)

WORLD PREMIERE RECORDINGS

◀ CDLX 7332

Martin Yates and the Royal Scottish National Orchestra make a striking discovery by coupling the second symphonies of John Gardner and John Veale, works dating from 1984-85 and 1965 respectively. Gardner was a well-loved figure in his time, as both teacher and composer, writing an enormous amount of music. The Second Symphony espouses a traditional treatment of the orchestra together with a personal lyricism, which will appeal to all who have taken Malcolm Arnold to heart. John Veale's career as a composer spanned half a century, including notable film music, but was interrupted by a long period when his lyricism was deemed critically unacceptable. The four-movement Second Symphony is a glorious personal statement, from the sadness of the opening *cor anglais* solo (later developed in the powerful slow movement) to the punchy, rhythmic writing and bold scoring, in which one is tempted to find elements of his sympathy for the American symphonies of the 1940s.

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who is also the disc's producer. A wretched Model D Steinway, which seems further out of tune with each successive piece, was captured in a none-too-flattering room on the Oklahoma City University campus over the course of five days last summer.

Monteiro's interpretation of *Les préludes*, heard here in a transcription by Karl Klauser, achieves some of the sweep and atmosphere of the original orchestral version. *Orpheus* and the *Künstlerfestzug* fare less well. *From the Cradle to the Grave*, one of the most interesting of the late-period works, and the 'Nocturnal Procession' from the *Two Episodes from Lenau's 'Faust'* unfortunately both succumb to Monteiro's tendency to accord equal emphasis to each beat of the bar. This lends the music a foursquare, leaden quality and places the shaping of phrases for expressive purposes almost beyond reach. The 'Nocturnal Procession' is not followed by the First *Mephisto Waltz*, its original companion in the Lenau Faust diptych, but by the Fourth *Mephisto Waltz*, a piece post-dating the original by a quarter century. Thus the programme concludes with the introduction of a jarring anachronism.

Patrick Rucker

Massenet

'Intégrale Piano Music'

Valse folle. Dix Pièces de genre, Op 10. *Musique pour bercer les petits enfants. Toccata. Deux Impressions. Valse très lente. Deux Pièces pour piano. Un Momento musicale. Improvisations. Devant la Madone. Aragonaise da 'Le Cid'. Méditation de 'Thaïs'*

Maurizio Zaccaria *pf*

Avèea  AE16003 (80' • DDD)



Think of Massenet and you think of *Werther*, *Manon* and the 'Méditation' from *Thaïs* – and not necessarily of piano music. But in addition to the operas, ballets, oratorios, symphonic works, incidental music for 14 plays and no fewer than 200 songs, his complete solo piano works comprise 12 titles composed between 1867 and 1907 (they break down into 29 separate short works) and fit conveniently on to one CD.

Another composer might have called them *Characterstücke* or *Lyric Pieces*, which they closely resemble in scale and content. Perhaps they might have become better known had they been marketed as such. They certainly deserve to be, with the exception, perhaps, of the seven *Improvisations* (1875).

Maurizio Zaccaria opens with *Valse folle* (1898), perhaps the least characteristic – and certainly least expected – piece from the pen of the always elegant and melodic Massenet. Inspired, surely, by one of Alkan's madcap capers, it is dedicated to Raoul Pugno, who recorded it in November 1903 (among the earliest discs made by any major pianist). Zaccaria plays it very well – especially the hilariously brutal ending – but not as well as the super-refined Marc-André Hamelin (Hyperion, 12/01) or the late Aldo Ciccolini, one of Zaccaria's mentors, on his benchmark two-disc set of Massenet's piano works (including the concerto and piano duets) recorded for EMI in 1977 and 1979.

But if Zaccaria does not rise to the same level, he makes a convincing and affectionate case for these miniatures, buried among them (in the delightful *Dix Pièces de genre*, Op 10) the famous 'Elégie' (No 5). With several charming salon pieces (try the *Valse très lente*), a scintillating Toccata and transcriptions of the Aragonese from *Le Cid* and the 'Méditation' from *Thaïs*, Zaccaria's *intégrale* is well worth your attention despite the enclosed acoustic and occasional thud of the pedal action. Jeremy Nicholas

Poulenc

Fifteen Improvisations. Three Novelettes.

Sonata for Four Hands^a. *L'embarquement pour Cythère*^a. *Concerto for Two Pianos*^a

Lucille Chung, ^aAlessio Bax *pfs*

Signum  SIGCD455 (62' • DDD)



Lucille Chung's new Poulenc disc is doubly welcome. To begin with, Chung is a startlingly original pianist whose solo work, apart from discs of Scriabin and Ligeti, we've heard too little of. Poulenc's piano music in general, and certainly the 15 *Improvisations* as a set, is under-represented among recent recordings. Chung was born in Montreal to devoutly Roman Catholic Korean parents, attended a French girls' school and has delighted in Poulenc since childhood. What better guide into the special realms of this idiosyncratic, intrinsically French yet thoroughly cosmopolitan 20th-century master?

The first six *Improvisations* were published together in 1932, with the remaining eight appearing singly through to 1959. Despite their protracted genesis and formal variety, they have in common a freshness of inspiration expressed with the

utmost economy of means (only the last exceeds three minutes). Chung captures the sense of a series of musical snapshots with the evanescent spontaneity of her playing. She is able to evoke the mercurial mood changes so characteristic of Poulenc with grace, consistently beautiful sound and an unerring sense of proportion. In succession, each seems more vivid than the last. The third might be a chance encounter with Prokofiev in the Place de la Concorde, the sixth a procession of toy soldiers. The wistful flow of the seventh verges on melancholy without succumbing. 'Hommage à Schubert', the 12th, lovingly evokes Biedermeier Vienna with perhaps a tip of the hat to Ravel, while the sombre intensity of the 13th seems to presage *Dialogues des Carmélites*.

The same precision of mood prevails in the three *Novelettes*. Morning freshness is conjured with guileless simplicity in the C major *Novelette*, while the third, 'on a theme of Manuel de Falla', exudes a sultry, straight-spined Iberian hauteur.

In the *Sonata for four hands*, *L'embarquement pour Cythère* and Poulenc's own transcription of his *Concerto for Two Pianos* for two pianists without orchestra, Chung is joined by her husband, Alessio Bax. Here the *Concerto* is the standout, gliding seamlessly between ferocity, biting irony, melting beauty and sheer magic. *Bon appétit!* Patrick Rucker

Prokofiev

'Piano Sonatas, Vol 3'

Piano Sonatas – No 6, Op 82;

No 7, Op 83; No 8, Op 84

Peter Donohoe *pf*

Somm  SOMMCD259 (70' • DDD)



Soon after his shared second-prize success in the 1982 Tchaikovsky Competition, Peter Donohoe recorded a splendid Prokofiev Sixth Sonata for his EMI solo debut (3/83). In 1991 he recorded the Sixth again for EMI, along with the two other 'War' Sonatas, Nos 7 and 8 (11/91). A quarter of a century later, he revisits these three works anew to conclude his Prokofiev sonata cycle for Somm.

Donohoe's new Seventh easily surpasses his earlier version. A slightly faster pace and more variegated staccato articulation impart a more graceful, less rigid shape to the opening movement's *Allegro inquieto* section, abetted by Somm's warmer sonic patina and realistic ambience. The *Andante caloroso* has gained textural heft and

GRAMOPHONE Collector

CHOPIN AND BEYOND

Harriet Smith listens to the latest recordings to come out of the Fryderyk Chopin Institute in Warsaw



Andrzej Wierciński: 'unfailingly cultured' in Chopin, Schumann and Scarlatti

Those at the Fryderyk Chopin Institute have been very busy of late and the discs just keep coming. On the one hand, we have 'The Real Chopin', the series aiming to put out his complete works played on period instruments. Then there's 'Music of Chopin's Time' which puts him in context with near-contemporary composers. And then we have 'Young Talents', which does what it says on the tin.

Into the last of these comes **Andrzej Wierciński**, who already has a string of competition successes to his name. He brings to Schumann's *Carnaval* an engaging enthusiasm and reactivity. Naturally, there's Chopin too, and Wierciński's playing is unfailingly cultured, if not perhaps all that individual (but he was only 19 when he recorded this disc); the Waltz, Op 18, comes off well, but in the Scherzos the darker recesses of Chopin's imagination aren't yet in evidence. But – unless you're an Argerich – the confidence to let go comes only with experience, and that's the one thing he lacks. The highlight of the album is the three Scarlatti sonatas, crystalline and vibrantly coloured.

Wierciński took part in last year's International Chopin Competition, which was eventually won by the Korean **Seong-Jin Cho**. He appears in the Chopin Institute's 'Blue Series', which celebrates players from the competition over the years. That

Cho was a worthy winner is evident right from the start of this disc. His Op 10 No 1 Etude is full of loving detail without ever sounding idiosyncratic; and he conjures up a whole world of possibility in the way he paces and colours the opening bars of the F minor Fantasy – when it finally takes off it has both rhetoric and a sense of freedom that is rare to find on the competition stage. But perhaps best of all among the solo pieces are the four Mazurkas of Op 33, each breathing a different air, from the whirling earthy Third to the Fourth, which emerges as if improvised.

The Chopin E minor Concerto, taken from the prize-winners' concert rather than the competition final, is initially a slightly portly affair in the hands of the Warsaw Philharmonic and Jacek Kaspszyk, emphasising the first movement's *maestoso* marking and complete with vibrato-heavy flutes. But from the moment Cho enters he takes command. Above all it's a reading of tremendous assurance – he knows what he wants to say and proceeds to say it, though not in an egocentric way. The slow movement has an intimacy despite the fact that the piano is relatively spotlit, and the finale has some beautifully responsive discourse between orchestra and soloist. The applause bursts in before the music has ended, and there's no doubt that Cho is a real talent.

We turn back the clock half a century for a recital by **Zbigniew Drzewiecki**

performed on Chopin's Pleyel, the last instrument the composer owned. When this was recorded back in 1961, such period-instrument performances were much more of a novelty than they are now. Drzewiecki was a distinguished teacher (his pupils including Felicia Blumenthal and Fou Ts'ong among many others), co-founder and jury member of the Chopin Competition and a renowned interpreter of Chopin's music. There's a palpable sense of enjoyment at being at the master's piano. However, it doesn't sound in the best of health, the upper register particularly dry – detrimental in a work such as the C sharp minor Nocturne, Op *posth*. Drzewiecki generally wears his 71 years lightly: even if the Op 26 No 2 Polonaise is a little cautious, the selection of Preludes from Op 28 has an ease that speaks of a lifetime in the company of Chopin.

Chopin of course had Field to thank for the invention of a genre he turned so much into his own. But Field's Nocturnes are no pale offering, especially when they're played with so much panache as by **Ewa Pobłocka**. Her instrument is an Erard from 1838 and it's in fine fettle, though the acoustic is a little over-reverberant. The very first Nocturne is given with eloquence, just the right degree of freedom and a restrained accompaniment set against which Field's melodies can soar. It's in striking contrast to the approach of Elizabeth Joy Roe (reviewed on page 64). Highlights are many, Pobłocka always bringing out the essentially vocal quality of the writing, be it the haunting No 5 in B major, the playfulness of No 15 in C major or the quiet sparkle of the E major, No 18. This is a disc that has certainly enriched my appreciation of these still underrated pieces. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Chopin, Schumann, D Scarlatti

Piano Works **Andrzej Wierciński**
Chopin Institute **€ NIFCCD703**



Chopin Piano Concerto No 1, Pf Wks

Seong-Jin Cho
Chopin Institute **€ NIFCCD625**



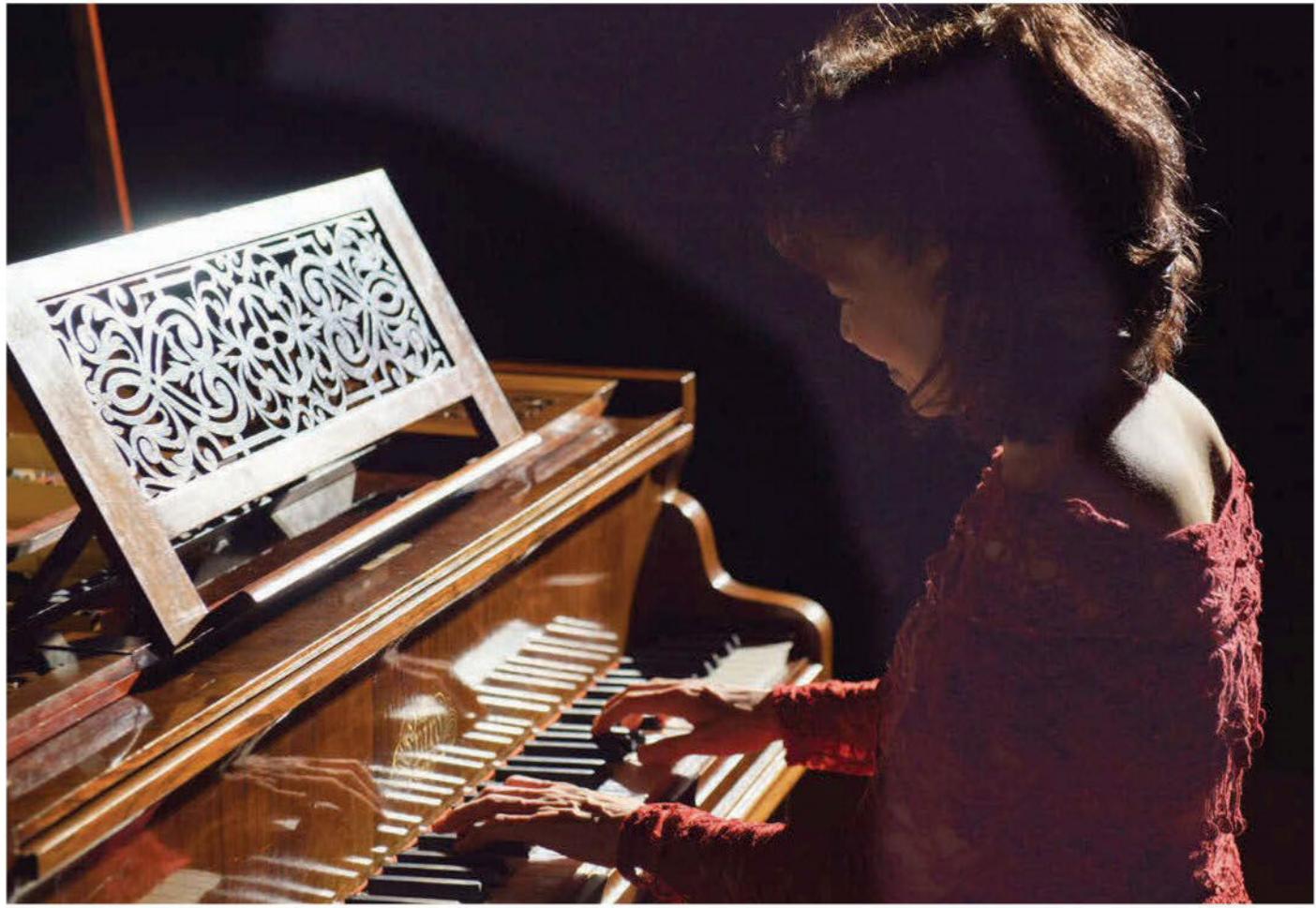
Chopin Piano Works

Zbigniew Drzewiecki
Chopin Institute **€ NIFCCD043**



Field Nocturnes

Ewa Pobłocka
Chopin Institute **€ NIFCCD102**



Noriko Ogawa embarks upon a new survey of Satie's piano works for BIS, recorded on an 1890 Erard

expressive sobriety. I approve, although I miss 1991's curvaceous moments and lighter touch. But the new *Precipitato*'s subtler dynamic calibrations and sharper attention to cross-rhythmic phrase groupings and implied countermelodies reveal more of the music behind Prokofiev's motoric machine.

As before, Donohoe decisively and ferociously launches into the Sixth's proclamatory *Allegro moderato*. Despite his astute voicing of the short woodwind-like chords, Donohoe's sedate second movement tempo falls short of a bona fide *Allegretto*, at least by Yefim Bronfman's standards. While Donohoe's *Vivace* finale retains its erstwhile clarity and sweeping momentum, it's slower, less supple and frankly less exciting when compared to his earlier readings, not to mention Matti Raekallio's astonishingly controlled diablerie. The opposite holds true for the Eighth's *Vivace*, where Donohoe's keyboard 'orchestration' now proves more pointed and finely honed. If the first movement's climaxes don't reach Gilels's harrowing boiling point, Donohoe still manages to sustain and keep afloat this long and sometimes discursive music. He

conveys the *Andante sognando*'s minuet sensibility well; but shouldn't the little pedal-point episode at 1'53" shimmer more softly and magically à la Richter or, indeed, Donohoe's younger self?

It goes without saying that the intelligence and seasoned artistry governing Donohoe's best Prokofiev performances deserve serious consideration. However, Raekallio's consistent interpretative strength and Ondine's more colourful engineering remain references for recorded Prokofiev sonata cycles on disc. **Jed Distler**

Sonatas Nos 6-8 – selected comparison:

Raekallio (10/11) (ONDI) ODE1103-2Q

Sonata No 6 – selected comparisons:

Bronfman (11/94) (SONY) SK52484 or 88883 73724-2

Sonata No 8 – selected comparison:

Gilels (OLYM) MKM161

Satie

Sept Gnossiennes. Le Piccadilly (Marche). Chapitres tournés en tous sens. Avant-dernières pensées. Croquis et agaceries d'un gros bonhomme en bois. Sonatine bureaucratique. Poudre d'or (Valse). Embryons desséchés. Descriptions automatiques. Heures séculaires et instantanées. Prélude en tapisserie. Les trois

valses distinguées du précieux dégoûté.

Je te veux (Valse). Trois Gymnopédies

Noriko Ogawa *pf*

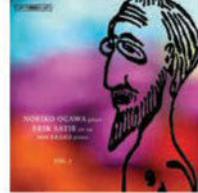
BIS (E) BIS2215 (78' • DDD/DSD)

Satie · C Gonzales

C Gonzales Gentle Threat *Satie Cinq Grimaces pour Le songe d'une nuit d'été. Six Gnossiennes. Trois Gymnopédies. Je te veux (Valse). Trois Sarabandes. Tendrement (Valse chantée)*

Olga Scheps *pf*

RCA Red Seal (E) 88986 30540-2 (64' • DDD)



John Cage's mantra that Erik Satie's structures were based around 'lengths of time rather than harmonic relations' (as quoted in the newly published *Selected Letters of John Cage*) ought not to be misconstrued. Satie was no innocent and his ability to massage harmony into relationships as much conceptual as functional relied on impeccable harmonic instincts that rarely let him down. But the

surface of his music often sounds as if it is holding its composer in contempt. Wouldn't this piece be great, the notes snipe, if it wasn't for this *naïf* harmonist? Let's resolve this next cadence properly! Oh, *zut alors*, he's missed it...again. And such layers of irony, detachment and internal critique are all part of a knowing game plan with which Satie interpreters need to engage.

Neither of these two new releases quite nails those bewitchingly eccentric kinks as persuasively as existing contenders like Aldo Ciccolini, Claire Chevallier or Philip Corner, although the Cologne-based pianist Olga Scheps comes tantalisingly close. The programming of Noriko Ogawa's first volume (I presume of Satie's complete piano music, although that is not stated explicitly) is certainly a draw with likes of the rarely heard *Embryons desséchés* and *Heures séculaires et instantanées* placed in the mix alongside evergreens such as the *Gnossiennes*, *Sonatine bureaucratique*, *Trois Gymnopédies* and *Je te veux*. But Ogawa too often carries on as if it's harmonic business as usual: her *Gymnopédies* have a slight air of triumphalism, while *Le Piccadilly (Marche)* and *Avant-dernières pensées* feel too much like generic neo-classicism.

Ogawa performs on an 1890 Erard but attacks it as if she's manoeuvring a modern grand: the subtle palette of painterly colours and brush-strokes that characterise Claire Chevallier's compelling album (*Zig-Zag Territoires*, 11/09) shows how the instrument can be made to resonate in sympathy with Satie's music. Olga Scheps plays on a new-fashioned grand piano, and even since I mentioned her in the previous paragraph I've warmed to her approach. Now the *Gymnopédies* feel appropriately stately and objectified, while her *Sarabande* in F minor emphasises that actually F minor is being kept on only as a retainer: Scheps keeps Satie's harmonically detached chords floating in a continuum of non sequiturs.

The sixth *Gnossienne*, which appears on both discs, turns up something of a mystery. Neatly dispatched by Ogawa in just over a minute (there's no tempo indication in Satie's score but he gives a preferred duration of 1'20"), Scheps stretches its structure to 2'30". I'm not certain why – lengths of time over harmony taken too far, perhaps? **Philip Clark**

Scriabin · Stockhausen

Scriabin 24 Preludes, Op 11. Three Pieces, Op 2. Etude, Op 8 No 12 **Stockhausen** Klavierstück XII: Examination from 'Donnerstag aus Licht'

Vanessa Benelli Mosell pf

Decca **FF** 481 2491 (63' · DDD)



In the booklet interview accompanying her latest CD, Vanessa

Benelli Mosell asserts that 'Scriabin and Stockhausen shared the ambition to present a totalitarian picture of the Universe through their compositions'. In fact, these composers inspire a wide and often contradictory range of interpretative gambits. In the main, Mosell's conception of Scriabin's Op 11 Preludes splits the difference between, say, the robust classicism of Piers Lane's Hyperion cycle and the subjective freedom marking Klara Min's Steinway & Sons recording.

Many details grab your attention. The bar-lines virtually disappear throughout her fast, fluid and highly flexible treatment of No 2, but not the narrative core. No 4's left-hand cantilena independently floats across the steady right-hand accompanying chords, while No 11 recovers its long lost animated qualities, and No 14's sudden crescendo surges gain newfound intensity. While Mosell takes No 16's homage to Chopin's 'Funeral March' slower than the printed metronome marking indicates, she nevertheless achieves a genuine *misterioso* and *sotto voce* ambience, abetted by generous pedalling. No 18 is appropriately *agitato* but the basic tempo hardly varies when Scriabin asks you to accelerate into a concluding *Presto*. Of the two Etudes forever linked with Horowitz, Op 2 No 1 features alluringly rolled chords and endless tone, while Op 8 No 11 is dynamically diffuse and lacks a real climax.

You don't really have to know that Stockhausen's *Klavierstück XII* derives from the opera *Donnerstag aus Licht* in order to appreciate its theatrical whimsy and myriad vocal effects, or its seemingly ragtag assemblage of jazz licks, Scriabin-esque repeated chords and runs that scurry like fireflies and sting like hornets. Mosell brings more abandon and sheer physicality to the score than Bernard Wambach does in his superficially cleaner yet more conservative interpretation (Koch Schwann – nla), especially in the third section where the pianist has to whistle and play tricky passagework at the same time.

This is Mosell's most focused and satisfying solo CD release to date.

Jed Distler

Scriabin Preludes – selected comparisons:
Lane (6/01th) (HYPE) CDH55450
Min (5/16^{US}) (STEI) STNS30045

Martha Argerich



'Early Recordings'

Beethoven Piano Sonata No 7, Op 10 No 3^a

Mozart Piano Sonata No 18, D576^b **Prokofiev**

Toccata, Op 11^c. Piano Sonatas – No 3, Op 28^c;

No 7, Op 83^d **Ravel** Gaspard de la nuit^c. Sonatine^a

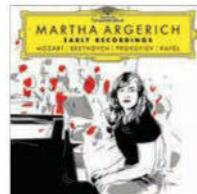
Martha Argerich pf

DG **M** ② 479 5978GH2 (91' · DDD)

Recorded by WDR Cologne, ^bJanuary 23,

^aSeptember 8, 1960, ^dOctober 31, 1967;

^cNDR Hamburg, March 16, 1960



The difficulty in writing about the piano playing of Martha Argerich is that it is now, and always has been, so relentlessly good. Just how good and for how long becomes immediately apparent in this newly sanctioned first release of recordings made for North German and West German Radio in 1960 and 1967. Before the earliest of these, Argerich had won the Busoni and Geneva competitions in 1957 and already made her debut in a number of important European cities; her career-defining victory in Warsaw at the Chopin Competition was in 1965. Here, alongside pieces she would later re-record, like the Prokofiev Toccata and Ravel's *Gaspard* and *Sonatine*, are heretofore unavailable interpretations, including two D major sonatas by Mozart and Beethoven (K576 and Op 10 No 3 respectively) and Prokofiev's Third Sonata.

Her Mozart bubbles with the freshness and effervescence of a Bernini fountain in the midday sun. Carefree runs and passagework cascade, catching the protean play of light. The *Adagio* unfolds with a touchingly guileless simplicity, while the finale seems less a dialogue than a convivial gathering of friends. It is impossible to take issue with this calibre of Mozart-playing. Unalloyed pleasure is the only response.

The *Presto* of the Beethoven D major Sonata is certainly urgent but far from hectic. The textures fully accommodate Beethoven's vivid dynamics and characteristic *sforzandos*, even as they maintain a clarity few pianists are able to achieve. As one would expect, the anguished *Largo e mesto* rises to an impassioned climax, all the more moving for its avoidance of any stylistic or pianistic excess. Following a frolicsome Minuet, replete with rustic Trio, the Rondo's ebullient hide-and-seek is irresistible. This near-ideal marriage of fully dimensional emotional content within exquisite classical proportions is a reminder of our impoverishment at having had so little solo Beethoven from Argerich of late.

Argerich's command of Prokofiev is



DG has released recordings made by Martha Argerich for German radio in the 1960s

quite unlike anyone else's, his compatriots included. The ineffable blend of driving power, disarming lyricism and formal balance she brings to the composer exude the sort of authority than can only be the result of conviction. The performance is thrilling from beginning to end. Would that the piece were longer.

In the spirit, perhaps, of the artisan who introduces some secret flaw into his work, lest the gods be jealous of its perfection, this two disc set is just short of *ne plus ultra*. The sound has that boxed-in quality that one encounters in radio broadcast recordings, particularly of this vintage, and unfortunately the first movement of the Beethoven suffers from some apparently irremediable distortion. That said, the true aficionado's ears adjust quickly enough. Besides, any new music from the fingers of Argerich is surely cause for celebration.

Patrick Rucker

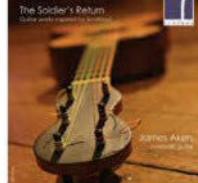
The Soldier's Return'

'Guitar Works Inspired by Scotland'

Giuliani Blue Bells of Scotland. Coming through the rye. Jenny's Bawbee, a Reel. The Old Country Bumpkin. Two Preludes and Scotsoises. The Soldier's Return. This is no my ain lassie

Legnani Variations - on Rossini's 'La marcia'; on Rossini's 'Oh quante lagrime' (both from *La donna del lago*) **Mertz** Fingal's Cave **Sor** Variations on a Scottish Theme **James Akers** *gtr*

Resonus  RES10165 (61' • DDD)



What happens when the expansive romantic visions of an 'exotic' Scotland such as one finds in Beethoven, Rossini, Mendelssohn or Verdi are reduced to the tiny sound world of the Romantic period guitar?

Quite a lot, as it turns out. For those 19th-century guitarists who sometimes moved in the same circles as the above composers, the novels of Walter Scott, the poems of Robbie Burns and indeed all things Scottish were an equal source of inspiration. Mauro Giuliani, Luigi Legnani, Johann Kaspar Mertz and the great Fernando Sor all arranged Scottish songs and dances or wrote sets of variations on Scottish themes. And far from feeling disadvantaged by the modest means of expression at their disposal when compared

with a piano or a symphony orchestra, they relished their instrument's ability to portray the bittersweet qualities of Scottish melodies while realising the music's potential for metamorphosis and subtle drama.

Scottish lutenist and guitarist James Akers, who here plays three original or copies of Romantic period guitars, is an experienced continuo player in both orchestral and operatic contexts. It could therefore be said that this music is his not only by birthright but by dint of his ability to bring the lyrical, *cantabile* and colouristic aspects of, say, Baroque opera, to the table when performing such music.

And so it comes to pass, with Akers imbuing, for example, the insouciant virtuosity of Legnani's Variations on Rossini's 'Oh quante lagrime', the wistful beauty of Giuliani's *Coming through the rye* and the melancholic theatre of Mertz's *Fingal's Cave* with all the warmth, colour and expressive richness one could hope for.

William Yeoman

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Bent Sørensen

Andrew Mellor points up the Dane's stylistic integrity – his use of silence and decay, and how he seems haunted by music of the past

The morning before the afternoon I'd set aside to start writing this appreciation of Danish composer Bent Sørensen, I found myself at a gallery in Abu Dhabi gazing upon works by the Syrian-American sculptor Diana Al-Hadid. The two artists work in different media and hail from opposite sides of the world – geographically, culturally and politically. But to experience Al-Hadid's exhibition *Phantom Limb* was to glimpse, in physical form, an uncanny representation of so much of what Sørensen's music does.

Yes, Sørensen was probably somewhere in the back of my mind before I set foot in the gallery. But I've stress-tested my belief that the composer and the sculptor are unwitting collaborators and that my visit to the gallery was, at the very least, an extraordinary and revelatory coincidence. Here are some reasons why I believe it a pertinent and valid comparison – and a helpful one, if Sørensen's music is new to you.

In *The Sleepwalker*, one of the gallery's white walls appears to dissolve before your eyes – peeling, dripping downwards towards the floor while making fleeting references to the forms of Renaissance and Classical masters as it does so. The piece could well be titled *It Is Pain Flowing Down Slowly on a White Wall*, the name of Sørensen's concerto for accordion and strings completed in 2011.

Sørensen found his voice early and never changed direction – a map of his stylistic development would resemble tree rings

That score, like almost every other by Sørensen, contains its own technical allusions to the music of the past, just as *The Sleepwalker* does with art. But the concerto is most remarkable for its relationship to the sound and space around it. If Al-Hadid's blank canvas is a white wall, then Sørensen's is silence. But in both cases, those elements aren't simply voids to be filled; they are integral and provocative parts of the discourse. Al-Hadid's wall drips down towards the floor, appearing to disintegrate into nothing – into the atmosphere itself, gaping holes revealing the room on the other side. In Sørensen's concerto, the strings begin to disintegrate. When that process is complete, the musicians first pick up and play harmonicas, then they are reduced to quiet humming, and eventually, before the concerto is finished, they pick up their instruments and leave the stage altogether (the solo accordionist is left in a sorrowful dialogue with a lone violinist positioned behind the audience).

The central work in Al-Hadid's *Phantom Limb* is also that which gave the exhibition its title. In this room-filling sculpture, a series of stacked cubes and decaying platforms – all dripping in grey and white, melting or drifting away – support and also partially conceal the dismembered parts of a Renaissance-style



statue. This speaks, to me at least, of Sørensen's interest in decay and his frequent but veiled references to the music of the past, particularly the Renaissance (or, in the case of the accordion concerto, Haydn). In his complementary movements to Ockeghem's unfinished Requiem – a series of choral movements that spanned most of Sørensen's career when they were gathered together in 2007 and recorded by Ars Nova Copenhagen in 2011 – we hear the twisting thread of the Renaissance polyphony the composer so loves. But it's rendered in Sørensen's characteristic harmonic smudging, as if the music is being pulled between the magnetic poles of warm, Romantic tonality and rich, Schoenbergian atonality.

The stalking shadow of those Renaissance figures in Sørensen's music – like the dismembered limbs in Al-Hadid's sculpture – is more than a formal underpinning or an act of canonic aesthetic retrospection. Instead, it's a close and sorrowful reminder that we are all destined, ultimately, to form 'the past' ourselves. 'From the moment we are born, there is one way – a slow slippage into decline,' said Sørensen some time in the mid-1990s, when his violin concerto *Sterbende gärten* ('Decaying Garden', 1992-93) was first performed; 'Time gnaws away at us.'

Composer and writer Karl Aage Rasmussen has referred to Sørensen's music as 'evoking lived lives and ancient dreams', despite its clear rooting in the here and now. 'It reminds me of something I've never heard,' said the Norwegian composer Arne Nordheim. Sørensen is a modernist who adores conventional intervals and lets himself be seduced by the simple shape of a song or a hymn. But always, those elements are concealed or yanked out of view before they can be cooked up

SØRENSEN FACTS

Born in Borup, July 18, 1958
Studied with Ib Nørholm at the Royal Danish Academy of Music, Copenhagen, and subsequently with Per Nørgård at the Royal Academy of Music, Aarhus
Awarded the Nordic Council Music Prize in 1996 for *Sterbende gärten*
Sørensen on spirituality

'People who say "I don't believe in anything" seem to be a bit scared of believing. You have to be open. I'm not a churchgoer and I don't follow anything. But we live in a world that produced Bach and Michelangelo; I live in a street where Kierkegaard walked. When you sit down to write a Requiem or a Passion, you have to have some spirit inside you. A Requiem that has nothing to do with religion - who'd want to hear that?' (Interview, 2015)

into something comfortable. Either that, or they appear wrecked from the start, with the strange, unsettling beauty of a disintegrating

Renaissance doorway or balcony. In colour, in form and in effect, Al-Hadid's *Phantom Limb* strikes me as a kindred spirit to a piece like Sørensen's motet *Og solen går ned* (2008).

Sørensen first came to prominence in the 1980s. He found his voice early and never changed direction. If you were to map his style, as Rasmussen has written, its development would resemble growth rings in a tree. His full-length opera *Under himlen* ('Under the Sky', 2003) was staged at the Royal Danish Opera in 2004. Four years before that, in 2000, the exquisite, pointillist piano concerto *La notte* (1996-98) was first performed by the BBC Symphony Orchestra and Rolf Hind. Some critics have pointed to the throbbing impulse and precise, calligraphic elements that Sørensen's music took on around that time. Perhaps those things, in the long term, contributed to the more prominent sense of 'time' – both suggestive pulses in the music and, in a more literal sense, ticking clocks and tolling bells – that has emerged in Sørensen's scores more recently.

But to my ears, Sørensen seems increasingly hesitant to fill the silence that surrounds him, to make a mark on the white wall – mostly owing to his delight in that silence in the first place. In January 2016, his new triple concerto was premiered in Copenhagen to quite some response, not just from the critics but from the public too. *L'isola della città* (2014-15), for huge orchestra and piano trio, is deafeningly quiet. Sørensen hallmarks are all over the piece: a Beethoven fugue drifts in like a ghost passing a window; the entire wind section is asked to play secondary instruments (in this case, 'ticking' woodblocks); he's happy to repeat a single pitch at length, forcing his audience to focus on what's to come;

and his textures are distilled, perhaps reaching new heights of windblown refinement, in fact.

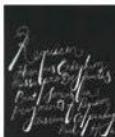
In a musicological sense, you might say Sørensen's counterpoint in the concerto is more sure, original and (paradoxically) neo-classical than ever. But there's something extraordinary about the control of the score, too – the presence of a huge orchestra lying mostly dormant, making such little noise but being utilised with relish nonetheless. In the radio broadcast of that premiere performance, Sørensen mentioned in an interview that 'the island in the city' might even be his own apartment, ever so slightly set back from Copenhagen's main square Kongens Nytorv, where the din of the city feels so close and yet rumbles on so quietly.

Space is as important as time in Sørensen's work. His truly unusual 'concerto for orchestra, choir, actors and audience' *Sounds Like You* (2007-8) was written for the embracing auditoria of the Bergen and Copenhagen concert halls. It explores the behaviour of two (actor) audience members, and to experience it is akin to taking your seat at a concert only to drift off into a strange, spiritual dream.

L'isola della città will be performed by its dedicatees, Trio Con Brio, at the Trondheim Chamber Music Festival in the autumn. In the meantime, Sørensen says that he has his mind on something big – a Passion setting that, like Bach's B minor Mass, will incorporate material from throughout his career. His own consistency should make that possible, and there's quite some stash to choose from. ☉

A SAMPLING OF SØRENSEN ON DISC

Three key recordings of his music

**Requiem (Sørensen / Ockeghem)**

Ars Nova Copenhagen / Paul Hillier
 Dacapo (7/12)

Sørensen doesn't identify as a choral composer but this merging of his own work *Fragments of Requiem* with the Requiem of 15th-century master Ockeghem could have fooled many into thinking the opposite. Sørensen uses elements of Ockeghem and Monteverdi to underpin his own harmonically 'smudged' writing.

**Phantasmagoria**

Trio Con Brio Copenhagen
 Dacapo (8/13)

Sørensen's piano trio *Phantasmagoria* (2006-7) is a precursor to his triple concerto and headlines this disc (trio works by Hans Abrahamsen and Per Nørgård hardly lessen its appeal). *Phantasmagoria* speaks of the fading memory of Romanticism and contains some remarkable writing, most of all, perhaps, the surging repetition of single notes at provocatively differing volumes in the *Misterioso e meccanico* movement.

**Sounds Like You**

Two actors, Danish National Vocal Ensemble and Symphony Orchestra / Thomas Dausgaard
 Dacapo

It's remarkable that Sørensen's spatial 'concerto for orchestra, choir, actors and audience', which calls for actors and singers planted throughout the audience of a vineyard concert hall (where everyone can see everyone else) has transferred so well to CD. Sørensen pulls off a characteristic trick here: doing new, unusual and surprising things that manage entirely to avoid gimmickry.

Vocal



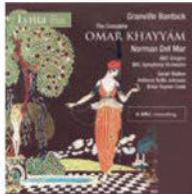
Tim Ashley on first recordings of Castelnuovo-Tedesco songs: 'The Shakespeare Sonnets gaze back nostalgically through time and distance at the European song tradition' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 76**



Alexandra Coghlan listens to more Polish Baroque from The Sixteen: 'Bertolusi's unending polyphonic lines and altogether darker, more chromatic palette are a welcome contrast' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 85**

Bantock

Omar Khayyám^a. *Fifine at the Fair*^b.
The Pierrot of the Minute^b. *Sappho*^c
^aSarah Walker, ^cJohanna Peters *contrs* ^aAnthony Rolfe Johnson *ten* ^aBrian Rayner Cook *bar*
^aBBC Singers; ^aBBC Symphony Orchestra;
^{b,c}BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra /
Norman Del Mar
Lyrita Itter Broadcast Collection
© ④ REAM2128 (4h 17' • DDD • T)
Broadcast performances, ^{b,c}August 7, 1968;
March 26, 1979



Composed between 1906 and 1909, cast in three parts and lasting some three hours and 20 minutes, Granville Bantock's thrillingly ambitious treatment of all 101 quatrains that make up the fifth and final edition of *The Rubáiyát of Omar Khayyám* freely translated by Edward FitzGerald (1809–83) serves up a veritable feast for the ears and imagination. Laid out for substantial forces comprising three vocalists, double chorus and a sizeable orchestra (including triple woodwinds and two antiphonally placed string choirs), Bantock's hedonistic setting received its first performance in February 1910, with further complete outings in 1912 and 1926.

Although the interwar period witnessed individual parts and various excerpts (such as the memorably evocative Prelude and 'Camel Caravan' from Part 1) championed by interpreters as distinguished as Beecham, Harty, Wood and Boult, *Omar Khayyám* was not heard again in its entirety until the present, hugely dedicated venture set down over two days in January 1979 at Studio 1 Maida Vale under the baton of Norman Del Mar. Richard Itter's off-air tapes preserve this remarkable BBC broadcast from March 26, 1979, for which we have to thank the indefatigable efforts of radio producer Michael Pope. If the results occasionally lack the orchestral and choral sophistication that Vernon Handley achieved on his typically lucid and eloquent 2007 Chandos set (also with the BBC SO, 11/07), Del Mar's

admirable soloists arguably sing with the greater urgency and passion. Most significantly, however, it scores over its more modern rival in being absolutely uncut, thereby allowing us to hear around 20 minutes of extra material – much of it wholly characteristic and highly attractive.

There are three additional items, all recorded by Del Mar with the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra and first aired on August 7, 1968 (the composer's centenary). Inspired by Robert Browning's eponymous poem, the headily voluptuous *Fifine at the Fair* (1912) helped keep Bantock's name alive, thanks in no small measure to Beecham's famous (albeit slightly pruned) 1949 recording. Del Mar's reading may not match either Beecham's or Handley's admirable RPO account (Hyperion, 3/93) for sheer allure, but its keen spirit and red-blooded temperament are never in doubt. The same goes for the endearing 1908 comedy overture *The Pierrot of the Minute* (which Del Mar later recorded with the Bournemouth Sinfonietta for RCA, 12/79) and an abridged performance of that intoxicating 1906 song-cycle *Sappho* with contralto Johanna Peters (whatever you do, though, don't miss Handley's stunning version of the complete sequence with mezzo-soprano Susan Bickley).

I should add that Rob Barnett's comprehensively detailed annotation contains a wealth of fascinating information and insight, and Mike Clements's watchful restorations fall most sympathetically on the ear. All told, a hugely enterprising addition to Lyrita's ever-growing catalogue; Bantock addicts will require no further incentive to purchase.

Andrew Achenbach

Beethoven

Missa solemnis, Op 123
Laura Aikin *sop* Elisabeth Kulman *mez*
Johannes Chum *ten* Ruben Drole *bass-bar*
Arnold Schoenberg Choir; Concentus
Musicus Wien / Nikolaus Harnoncourt
Sony Classical ④ 88985 31359-2 (81' • DDD • T/t)
Recorded live at the Stephaniensaal, Graz,
July 3-5, 2015



This is a remarkable account of Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* and, in one important respect, an unusual one. For though it is in no sense lacking in drama, it is in essence a deeply devotional reading. And aptly so. 'Mit Andacht' – 'with devotion' – Beethoven writes time and again during the course of the work.

Where many of the Mass's most praised interpreters have treated it as a species of music drama, the god Dionysus never far distant, Harnoncourt's performance has an atmosphere you might more normally expect to encounter when listening to a piece such as the Fauré Requiem. His aim was to 'develop the work from silence' and 'keep the usual frenzied sonorities within bounds'. A search for inner and outer peace – the aspiration Beethoven writes above the opening bars of the 'Dona nobis pacem' – is the performance's ultimate goal.

Harnoncourt first conducted the *Missa solemnis* in 1988, when he was nearing his 60th year. That was with modern forces, as was his usual practice in big Beethoven. By the time of these final performances, however, he was using the Arnold Schoenberg Choir and the period instrumentalists of his own Concentus Musicus Wien. The effect of the change is evident from the opening bars, where the soft-grained sonorities of the older instruments and the grieving mood they engender help create the sense that this is no ordinary journey upon which we are about to embark.

The solo violin in the *Benedictus* notwithstanding, the orchestra is not a principal player in the *Missa solemnis*. What it does do, however, is establish moods and create atmosphere in such moments as the lead towards the 'Gratias' and the 'Qui tollis', the *Kyrie* and the *Sanctus*. It's here that the gut strings, the old-fashioned flutes and the three different kinds of clarinet Beethoven asks for (one now defunct) draw



The Hebrides Ensemble and Synergy Vocals recording James MacMillan's *Since it was the Day of Preparation...* for Delphian (review page 79)

forth the quieter, softer colours that are key to establishing the devotional mood Harnoncourt's performance seeks.

Though he never drives or hectors, Harnoncourt brings a sense of unalloyed joy to the *Gloria*, after which we experience gentler rhythms and more muted colours during the mysteries of the *Credo*, a movement Beethoven himself finishes with an upwards Fall, a mysterious vanishing towards the stars.

Not the least of the benefits Harnoncourt brings to the work is the almost tactile feel his choir and soloists have for the Latin text. No performance I know delivers the tenors' great unaccompanied cry 'Et resurrexit' with the voltage of Klemperer's old 1951 Vox recording (6/53 – nla). Yet Harnoncourt's is unforgettable too since it marries joy, shock and wonder in more or less equal measure.

The soloists were clearly hand-picked for the enterprise, not least the tenor Johannes Chum, whose singing can best be described as seraphic. The recording, by engineers from Austrian Radio, is mellow-toned yet crystal-clear, so beautifully adjusted are the balances between solo and choral voices and the lovely sounds of Concentus Musicus's old instruments. I read that

Harnoncourt wished this recording to be, in some sense, his personal legacy. It's not difficult to see why. **Richard Osborne**

Braunfels

'Orchestral Songs, Vol 1'

Die Vögel - Prelude and Prologue of the Nightingale^a; Farewell to the Forest^b. Zwei Hölderlin-Gesänge, Op 27^c. Auf ein Soldatengrab, Op 26^d. Don Juan, Op 34^e ^{ab}Valentina Farcas sop ^bKlaus Florian Vogt ten ^cMichael Volle bar Staatskapelle Weimar / Hansjörg Albrecht Oehms (OC1846 (68' • DDD • T)



Hansjörg Albrecht's survey of Braunfels's orchestral Lieder gets off to a strange start, since just over half of its first instalment is taken up by the purely orchestral *Don Juan* of 1924, making its second appearance on disc this year. The rest consists of works for voice and orchestra written between 1913 and 1916, though 'Vorspiel und Prolog der Nachtigall' and 'Abschied vom Walde', for soprano and tenor respectively, are effectively concert fragments from the opera *Die Vögel*, composed before the rest

of the score and eventually forming its opening and closing scenes.

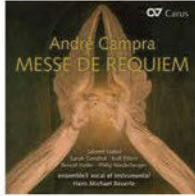
The primary focus consequently falls on the big Hesse setting *Auf ein Soldatengrab* and the *Hölderlin Songs*, two wartime works for bass-baritone, premiered together in 1918 but written in 1915-16, after Braunfels's conscription into the German army but before he had seen the horrors of active service. Though ambivalent, they are not pacifist. 'Oh take me, take me into your ranks that I might not die an ordinary death', Hölderlin writes. And a stoically lyrical nobility, suggestive of patriotic self-sacrifice, alternates with ostinato-driven fear and unnerving apprehensions of carnage, the melodic contours and dense orchestration revealing a close familiarity with parts 2 and 3 of *Gurrelieder*. Michael Volle sings them with such raw intensity that his occasional moments of unsteadiness don't matter that much.

Albrecht's conducting is fierce and passionate here, though elsewhere he seemingly favours lucidity over drive. The *Vögel* extracts sound exquisite as played by the Weimar Staatskapelle: Valentina Farcas negotiates the Nightingale's Zerbinetta-ish coloratura with ravishing tone and delightful ease; Klaus Florian Vogt is clean and clear but characterless in 'Abschied

vom Walde'. *Don Juan*, which despite its Straussian title is actually a set of variations on themes from *Don Giovanni*, is super-cool and refined: its predecessor, from Markus L Frank and the Altenburg-Gera Philharmonic (Capriccio, 2/16) has some rough-edged playing but gives an altogether stronger impression of its emotional and dramatic range. **Tim Ashley**

Campra

Messe de Requiem^a. De profundis
Salomé Haller, ^aSarah Gendrot sop
Rolf Ehlers counterten Benoît Haller ten
Philip Niederberger bass ensemble3 vocal
et instrumental / Hans Michael Beuerle
Carus (F) CARUS83 391 (60' • DDD • T/t)



The manuscript of André Campra's *Messe des morts* in the Bibliothèque

Nationale does not reveal when or why it was composed. It used to be assumed that it had been written before success as an opera composer forced him to quit his post at Notre-Dame (ie before 1700), but now some scholars suggest it might have been connected to a memorial service in 1724 for the recently deceased Duke Philippe d'Orléans – the regent and cousin of Louis XV and the patron responsible for Campra's elevation in January 1723 to the shared position of director of Musique de la Chapelle du Roi. If so, it dates from approximately the same period as the solemn *grand motet* *De profundis* (1723), and so it makes sense that these two masterpieces are placed alongside each other by Hans Michael Beuerle and ensemble3 vocal et instrumental (a group of professional singers and players assembled from the Rhineland, Alsace, Switzerland and France).

The small band plays subtly, *inégales* are tastefully relaxed and trills are pointed elegantly. There are subtle colorations from a pair of flutes, such as in the first section of the *Agnus Dei* (sung gorgeously by Benoît Haller). The choir is honey-toned and luminous, and the soloists are uniformly compelling; I particularly enjoyed the articulate high tenor Rolf Ehlers in the first section of the *Graduel*. A slightly larger band with more presence at the bottom end might have made more of the intoning bell-like pedal bass notes in the Post-Communion, but there is plenty of warm sonority to accompany the polished delivery of the bass Philip Niederberger in the imploring start of *De profundis*. As fate had it, Beuerle died

shortly after this project, so in a manner of speaking these poignant petitions for eternal rest and perpetual light have become the conductor's own exequies.

David Vickers

Castelnuovo-Tedesco

'What think you I take my
pen in my hand to record?'
Leaves of Grass, Op 89b.
Shakespeare Sonnets, Op 125 – selection
Salvatore Champagne ten Howard Lubin pf
Oberlin Music (F) OC16-02 (70' • DDD • T)



These two works were composed either side of Castelnuovo-Tedesco's emigration

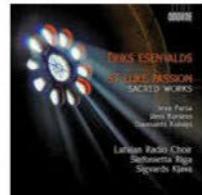
to the United States in 1939 following Mussolini's introduction of racial laws into Italy the previous year. *Leaves of Grass*, setting sections of the Calamus sequence of Whitman's eponymous collection, was written in the summer of 1936. The bulk of the *Shakespeare Sonnets*, 17 (out of 32) of which are included here, date from 1944–45, though Castelnuovo-Tedesco kept adding to the set on and off for the next 20 years. Both works remain unpublished. These are their first recordings and we owe their discovery to archival research on the part of tenor Salvatore Champagne and pianist Howard Lubin, both teachers at the Oberlin Conservatory of Music, on whose own label the disc appears.

The scholarly accompanying material argues that *Leaves of Grass* constitutes a private critique of fascism, and it would seem that Castelnuovo-Tedesco deliberately withheld the score from his publishers. Whitman's work was much admired across the political spectrum in '20s and '30s Italy, appealing both to fascists, who liked his emphasis on male-bonded virility, and anti-fascists, who stressed his inclusive ideology of human brotherhood. The cycle moves Platonically from the specific to the universal, gazing as it goes at the emergence of 'the new city of Friends' in opposition to 'dangers, odium, unchanging, long and long', as austere, rhythmic declamation gradually gives way to lyricism. It's a striking work, more so, in some ways, than the more conventional *Shakespeare Sonnets*, which gaze back nostalgically through time and distance at the European song tradition of Schubert, Schumann and Debussy. Castelnuovo-Tedesco's way with English is remarkable: only the occasional slip in accentuation reminds us he was not a native speaker.

Textual response is also Champagne's great strength. His voice is reminiscent of Pears, though there's some constriction at the top, leading to uncomfortable moments in *Shakespeare Sonnets*, where the tessitura is frequently taxing. But his diction is immaculate: you can hear every word, and hear it given meaning, even when the voice itself is under pressure. Lubin, beautifully stylish throughout, comes very much into his own in *Leaves of Grass*, where the piano, at times even more than the voice, carries the emotional weight. The accompanying material is superbly produced and presented, though the printed order of *Shakespeare Sonnets*, for some mysterious reason, differs irritatingly from that being sung. **Tim Ashley**

Ešenvalds

Passion According to St Luke^a. A Drop in the Ocean^b. The First Tears^c. Litany of the Heavens^d
^bIeva Ezeriņa sop ^aIeva Parša mez ^bLīga Paegle
contr ^aJānis Kuršēvs ten ^aDaumants Kalniņš bar
^cAleksandrs Maijers rec/jew's hp Latvian Radio
Choir; ^{abd}Sinfonietta Riga / Sigvards Kļava
Ondine (F) ODE1247-2 (68' • DDD • T/t)



Ešenvalds's *St Luke Passion* (2014) plunges the listener straight into the midst of the Crucifixion scene, rushing strings underlying the terrible urgency of the crowd's shouts of 'Crucify him!'. It's an unusual and highly effective beginning, and I can say that it is unlike any other setting of the Passion with which I am familiar. Ešenvalds has a highly individual and striking melodic style, and there are wonderfully memorable moments for all three soloists (reflective passages include the second section and the fourth, a Middle Eastern-inflected setting of the Shema Yisrael for the smoky timbre of mezzo Ieva Parša) to offset the predominantly dramatic tone of the work. As well as the narrative from St Luke's Gospel and the Shema Yisrael, Ešenvalds makes use of other texts, including prayers, and poetry by James Weldon Johnson and Christina Rossetti. Words by Rossetti are used for the final section, and I find this the least satisfactory; it seems to descend into a rather forced Romantic nostalgia, though the very final moments, fading away to silence, are very impressive.

A Drop in the Ocean (2006) is classic Ešenvalds, a combination of different prayers and languages, exploiting the paradoxical grounded-yet-ethereal quality of the Latvian singers. It was originally written for the outstanding Kamēr youth



Hans Michael Beuerle conducts ensemble3 vocal et instrumental in works by André Campra on Carus

choir from Riga, and in spite of its predominantly meditative character, technical challenges are far from lacking. *The First Tears* (2014) is in effect a miniature cantata, based on an Inuit folk tale. It is shamanistic in tone, as befits the nature of the text, dealing with the moments after the creation of the world by the Raven; the composer not only makes wonderfully atmospheric use of the choir to create appropriate soundscapes but also employs a drum and other percussion instruments, a Jew's harp and a solo recorder to huge colouristic effect. In *Litany of the Heavens* (2011) we hear for the first time the Latvian language: Ešenvalds makes use of a recording of an old man's prayers heard from within a church, while the choir and ensemble provide what he calls a 'prayerscape'. Colours are again idiosyncratic, to great effect – this time we have tuned glasses and overtone singing.

One could hardly ask for better performers in this repertoire than the Latvian Radio Choir under the inspired direction of Sigvards Klava, and Ondine's recording, made in St John's Church in Riga, is a model of clarity. A superb release.

Ivan Moody

Handel

Four Coronation Anthems^a. Esther^b – Sinfonia; Shall we the God of Israel fear; Ye sons of Israel mourn; Tyrants may a while presume; Save us, O Lord; God is our hope

NDR Chorus; Göttingen Festival Orchestra / Laurence Cummings

Accent © ACC26405 (55' • DDD • T)

Recorded live at the Stadthalle, Göttingen,

^bMay 17, 2012; ^aJune 7, 2014



The Archbishop of Canterbury's scribbles on his order of service

reveal that the music did not go smoothly during the coronation of George II and Queen Caroline at Westminster Abbey on October 11, 1727. Happily, the success of Handel's four anthems for the occasion directly influenced the choral elements in his first public oratorios a few years later. For example, *My heart is inditing* and *Zadok the Priest* – with the parody text 'God is our hope and our strength' – were both incorporated into the expanded version of *Esther* performed during the 1731–32 opera season. Therefore it is an interesting idea

for Accent to issue the Göttingen Handel Festival's NDR broadcasts of all four coronation anthems (recorded in 2014) alongside a selection of five choruses from the 1732 version of *Esther* (taken from a performance of the oratorio by almost identical personnel two years earlier).

As it happens, the majority of the music chosen from the oratorio is from the original Cannons version (c1720), but the disc concludes with the aforementioned 'God is our hope' (attentive listeners will spot that for the oratorio version Handel removed the section 'and all the people rejoiced and said'). Laurence Cummings's assured shaping of the excellent orchestra and the NDR Chorus's strong yet balanced textures are particularly satisfying in the largest-scale brassiest passages of the Coronation Anthems. Whether in the suspenseful theatricality of the opening of *Zadok the Priest* or the regal splendour of the 'Alleluja' fugue that concludes *The king shall rejoice*, often these resonant live performances are globally on a par with the best studio versions in the sizeable catalogue. The Hamburg-based choir misses the mark slightly for the feminine middle sections designed to illustrate the attributes of Queen Caroline in *My heart is*

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inditing, but the doleful 'Ye sons of Israel mourn' from *Esther* shows that this Teutonic choir can sing Handel in English with as much eloquence as any native British choir. **David Vickers**

Lescurel

'The Love Songs of Jehan de Lescurel'
Abundance de felonie. Amours, aus vrais cuers
commune. Amours, cent mille mercyz. Amours,
que vous ai meffait. Amours, trop vous doi
cherir. Amour, voulés vous acorder. A vous,
douce debonnaire. Belle, com loiaus amans.
Belle et noble, a bonne estrainne. Bien se peüst
apercevoir. Bien se lace. Bietris est mes delis.
Bonne Amour me rent. Bonnement m'agrée.
Bontés, sen, valours et pris. Comment que pour
l'eloignance. Dame, vo regars m'ont mis en la
voie. Dame gracieuse et belle. Dame, par vo
dous regart. Dame, si vous vient a gré. D'amour
qui n'est bien celee. De gracieuse dame amer.
De la grant joie d'amours. Diex, quant la verrai.
Dis tans plus qu'il ne faudroit flours. Douce
Amour, confortez moi. Douce dame, je vous pri.
Douce desirree. Fi, mesdisan esragié.
Gracieusette. Guilleurs me font mout souvent

Ensemble Céladon / Paulin Bündgen countertenor
Ricercar (CD) RIC366 (76' • DDD • T/t)



Jehan de Lescurel's known songs are all in a single manuscript from the second

decade of the 14th century, and he is identified as their author only in the acrostic of one of the songs: we just assume, from their unity of musical and poetic style, that they are all by him. But this is a collection of massive importance, not least because this is more or less the first place where the three *formes fixes* of medieval French song appear in their classic form.

His music has in general been less recorded than one might expect, but the special feature of the present issue is that it contains everything apart from two *diz entez* which are difficult to perform realistically. Not only that, but in order to get everything on to a single CD the musicians of the Ensemble Céladon have been less tempted to fill out the music with introductions and interludes. The result is that in every case you get a clear aural perception of the musical and poetic forms – which in the case of Jehan de Lescurel seems to me the most important thing. The CD will therefore be a perfect entry point for students wishing to understand this repertory. To help even further, they have presented the music more or less in manuscript order.

Clara Coutouly sings the songs whose texts are entirely in the female voice; Anne

Delafosse sings those whose texts could have a man or a woman singing; and Paulin Bündgen takes the main role in the remainder (though all three wonderful musicians take some part in almost all the songs). Five instrumentalists offer what is on the whole a thoroughly discreet accompaniment. These are all performances on a very high level. No purchaser will be disappointed.

David Fallows

Machaut

'A Burning Heart'

Aucune gent/Qui plus aimme/Fiat voluntas tua.
Cinc, un, trese. Esperance qui m'asseüre. Hé,
dame de vaillance. Helas, pour quoy se demente
et complaint. Pas de tor en thies pais. Plus dure
que un dyamant. Se je me pleing je n'en puis
mais. Se mesdisans en acort. Tous corps/De
souspirant/Suspiro. Tuit mi penser. Une vipere
en cuer ma dame maint. Vos dous resgars,
douce dame, m'a mort

The Orlando Consort

Hyperion (CD) CDA68103 (59' • DDD • T/t)



In this third instalment of the series, The Orlando Consort present a kind of minimalist Machaut. Most of the songs on this disc are monodic virelais or two-voice pieces, the four voices joining together at the very end. On paper this might seem forbidding (not to say hair-shirt), but that would be to reckon without Machaut's range and versatility. The aforementioned virelais are marvels in this respect, here lucid and seemingly effortless (*Tuit mi penser*), there tortuous and deliciously unpredictable (*Hé, dame de vaillance*, which opens the recital). Hearing several of them grouped together (as with the Gothic Voices' 'The Mirror of Narcissus' all those years ago – Hyperion, 1/84) offers a masterclass in maximum variety gleaned from minimal means. But then, variety is the disc's guiding principle, for pieces with the same number of voices are otherwise clearly contrasted. Equally, the progression from one to four voices becomes a rhetorical gambit in its own right, so that the last of the three-voice pieces and the concluding *Aucune gent/Qui plus aimme* feel like the culmination of a process. This knack of effective programming serves this particular composer particularly well.

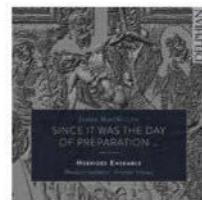
The Orlando Consort themselves appear in a variety of combinations. In the series' previous instalments it was the voice of countertenor Matthew Venner that stood out, but here the three lower voices

dominate proceedings, nowhere more effectively than on *Vos dous regars*, perhaps the disc's finest performance among the polyphonic pieces. The virelais, again, are a rare chance to hear the singers' individual voices. It is perhaps inevitable that Machaut's varied ranges serve up the occasional curve ball (or yorker, if you prefer), and *Se je me pleing* stretches the lower duo uncomfortably. But it's a single duff note in an otherwise very impressive recital. **Fabrice Fitch**

MacMillan

Since it was the Day of Preparation...

Brindley Sherratt bass Synergy Vocals;
Hebrides Ensemble / William Conway vc
Delphian (CD) DCD34168 (72' • DDD • T)



Few composers in recent times have so unequivocally brought their faith into the concert arena as has James MacMillan. Here we have the latest in a stream of major works which express his deeply held Catholicism, and for my money it is by far and away the most effective. Combining elements inspired by plainchant, Scottish folk melody, Arabic dance (the Interlude which concludes the first part), Renaissance music, Bach, Stravinsky and Britten (most notably at the start of the second part), the language is uniquely and undeniably MacMillan's own, as is the highly unusual decision to set a Biblical text which has rarely been set before in any period of musical history.

Something of a sequel to his earlier *St John Passion*, and cast in three parts which run continuously, *Since it was the Day of Preparation...* sets the final section of St John's Gospel, encompassing the period from the death of Christ through the Resurrection to his final dismissal of the disciples. The text, as MacMillan shows, has plenty of opportunity for dramatic colour as well as for introspection, but perhaps it is this latter element which is most potently brought out in this outstanding recording, made in the generous environment of the RSNO's centre in Glasgow.

It is scored for the curious instrumental line-up of harp, theorbo, cello, clarinet and horn, with occasional additional bells which MacMillan himself plays on this recording, and the text is delivered by a quintet of solo voices, which, especially when sung with such delicious clarity as Synergy Vocals here, creates a wonderfully transparent quality, even in the murky waters of the Sea

GRAMOPHONE *Collector*

WANDERLUST AND EXILE

Edward Breen listens to a selection of discs exploring the boundary between East and West



The countertenor Yanniv d'Or goes on a fascinating musical journey on his new album, *Latino Ladino*, released on Naxos

Early musicians look east not because they find it quaintly exotic, nor because they learned from Disraeli that it is a career. They look, and have always looked, because they realise that the roots of the 'Western' story are as inextricably intertwined with the East as is its present.

The modern early musician (if you forgive the oxymoron) is heir to an important lineage of musical thought, one that has fundamentally shaken the broader frame of classical music in which it perches. Whereas early-20th-century performances tended to come straight from the page in the prevailing chamber music style, things changed in the 1960s when, for instance, performers such as Thomas Binkley looked to Andalucian improvisatory practices to inform the performance of medieval dance, and he and others began to view monody as a starting point rather than an absolute. By the 1980s Christopher Page moved away from what he once described as the 'medieval-banquet, rosy-cheeked-wench, suckling-pig view of the medieval past' towards a more 'cathedralish' Middle Ages, and perhaps it was no coincidence

that around this time Peter Phillips also discovered that an Urtext renaissance suited the clean digital sound of CD. Having now established a canon of early music, the movement is restless again and seems to be revisiting its 1960s roots. I for one detect wanderlust.

Dalmatica: Chants of the Adriatic is a exploration of the common origins and close intertwining of early chants through the Croatian tradition for performing Roman Catholic liturgy with vernacular (old Slavonic and old Croatian) languages, Glagolitic chant. The female vocalists of Dialogos perform music from the female monastic tradition and in particular their rendition of a troped *Sanctus* from a monastery in Zadar is absolutely mesmeric. The rhapsodic lines overlap, almost tumbling over each other in a moment of religious ecstasy. The contrast with the rich, impassioned voices of vocal ensemble Kantaduri in chants from local Croatian traditions serves only to enhance the beauty of each devotional tradition.

Mediterraneum by the Capella de Ministrers is the third album in a trilogy dedicated to the 700th anniversary of the

theologist and philosopher Ramon Llull, proponent of 'pax universalis'. In what they describe as 'a musical journey around the medieval Mediterranean', Carles Magraner and his sprightly ensemble perform music from most of the main musical genres from Llull's lifetime including motets from the Montpellier Codex, Cantigas de Santa Maria and a North African Cançó. The performance of troubadour Guiraut Riquer's *Jhesus Cristz, filb de Dieu* employs a variety of improvisatory techniques that resonate with many other traditions represented in this programme.

Furthermore, three new discs explore aspects of cultural influence on Sephardi Jews following their expulsion from Spain in 1492 and trace their various journeys through Italy, Turkey, the Middle East and beyond. **Sephardic Journey: Wanderings of the Spanish Jews** from Apollo's Fire represents – to magical effect – Jewish music as fully enmeshed in daily life, interlacing sacred and secular, highlighted by selections from Salamone Rossi's *The Songs of Solomon*. *Halleluyah 'Ashrei 'ish* showcases the sheer zest and spirit of this remarkable ensemble as they create a buoyant and joyous antiphonal texture.

Mezzo-soprano Romina Basso's elegant performances on **Voices de Sefarad: Four Centuries of Spanish & Sephardic Songs** range from the intimate lute songs of Alonso Mudarra to passionate, extrovert settings by Manuel de Falla. Listen for her huge range of vocal subtleties, fully displayed in the Hispanic romance *El rey de mucha madruga*.

Latino Ladino is the latest album from the inventive countertenor Yaniv d'Or. His rich, honeyed falsetto guides us through various Ladino traditions, eventually crossing the Atlantic to the *Missa Mexicana* of 1677. Here d'Or multitracks both voices of Francisco Escalada's *Canten dos Filguerillos*, a wonderful flamenco-infused setting of two goldfinches watching over the Christ child. Flamenco also appears in the Ladino song 'A la una yo naci', which d'Or has traced as far as Peru. This sumptuous programme is enhanced by excellent booklet-notes from Richard Jones, who explains how each performance has been constructed in what d'Or himself often calls a folk-Baroque style.

These are discs about the early origins of various musics and music's connectedness, and as such they showcase the fundamental inquisitive nature of the early music movement, constantly seeking to understand other cultures in other times through oral and written traditions. In such efforts the pax universalis of Ramon Llull lives on, and this is best summed up in the words of EM Forster's Margaret Schlegel (*Howards End*): 'Only connect!... Only connect the prose and the passion, and both will be exalted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer. Only connect, and the beast and the monk, robbed of the isolation that is life to either, will die.' **G**

THE RECORDINGS



'Dalmatica: Chants of the Adriatic'
Dialogos, Kantaduri
Arcana **Ⓐ A395**



'Mediterraneum'
Capella de Ministrers
Capella de Ministrers **Ⓐ CDM1639**



'Sephardic Journey'
Apollo's Fire
Avie **Ⓐ AV2361**



'Voices de Sefarad'
Basso, Mesirca; Turkish Ens
Brilliant **Ⓐ 95222**



'Latino Ladino'
Yaniv d'Or; Ens NAYA
Naxos **Ⓐ 8 573566**

of Tiberius which wash in at the start of the third part. Brindley Sherratt is the superbly resonant bass who sings the words of Christ, but tenor Benedict Hymans deserves special mention for his enchanting delivery of the opening verses of the text.

These were the performers who premiered the work at the 2012 Edinburgh Festival, and they have performed it several times since. So by the time they committed it to disc, they had developed a real affinity for it, and this informs every moment of this intensely moving performance. Directed by the work's dedicatee, William Conway (who has, most effectively, the last word in the recording), the Hebrides Ensemble – each member of which is allotted a substantial solo in the interludes that punctuate the sung sections – provide eloquent testimony to the sustained impact of MacMillan's writing. **Marc Rochester**

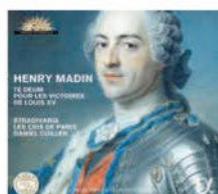
Madin

Te Deum, HM28. **Diligam te, Domine**, HM22

Anne Magouët, Michiko Takahashi *sopr* **Robert Getchell, Alban Dufour** *tens* **Alain Buet, Geoffroy Buffière basses** **Les Cris de Paris; Stradivaria / Daniel Cuiller**

Alpha **Ⓐ ALPHA963 (69' • DDD • T/t)**

Recorded live at the Chapel Royal, Versailles, June 27, 2015



'Possibly of Irish origin', says *Grove*, but the booklet-note states firmly that

Henry Madin (1698–1748) was the son of a soldier from Galway stationed near Verdun. Orphaned as a baby, Madin was educated by the Jesuits and ordained priest. Musical posts at a number of cathedrals including Bourges and Rouen led to his appointment as *sous-maître de musique* of the Chapel Royal at Versailles in 1738 and *maître de pages* (the choirboys) four years later. This disc is a recording of a concert given in that very chapel last year.

However, the first performance of the *Te Deum* was not given at Versailles. It took place in Paris to celebrate the capture of Freiburg im Breisgau in 1744, during the War of the Austrian Succession. Lasting some 45 minutes, it includes many triumphant passages, trumpet and timpani well to the fore. The opening 'Te Deum laudamus' begins with the trumpet and a lively solo, extremely well sung by an unidentified haute-contre whose distinctive tone recalls that of the American countertenor Russell Oberlin. At the end, where 'non confundar' is followed by a

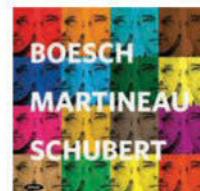
prayer for the king, the manner is similarly forthright. But many of the other movements verge on the contemplative, often in the minor key. 'Pleni sunt caeli', given to a solo bass, is slow and restrained; the soprano duet 'Te per orbem' is similarly thoughtful. Much of the choral writing is contrapuntal; despite a resonant acoustic – hear the echo at the end of 'tibi Cherubim'! – the engineers have captured the detail very well.

Diligam te, Domine is a setting of verses from Psalm 18. With more modest scoring, compared to the *Te Deum*, Madin still writes vividly: repeated crotchetts in the strings under an agitated violin line represent an earthquake; a lovely flowing bass-line accompanies the sole duet. Daniel Cuiller is well in command of his forces in both pieces; worth investigating. **Richard Lawrence**

Schubert

Abendstern, D806. **Am Tage aller Seelen (Litanei auf das Fest Allerseelen)**, D343. **An den Mond**, D259. **An die Musik (second version)**, D547. **An mein Herz**, D860. **Du bist die Ruh**, D776. **Erster Verlust**, D226. **Der Fischer**, D225. **Fischerweise**, D881. **Frühlingsglaube**, D686. **Geheimes**, D719. **Der Gott und die Bajadere**, D254. **Gruppe aus dem Tartarus**, D583. **Heidenröslein**, D257. **Im Frühling**, D882. **Der König in Thule**, D367. **Lachen und Weinen**, D777. **Die Liebe hat gelogen**, D751. **Nachtviolen**, D752. **Schwanengesang**, D744. **Der Sieg**, D805. **Der Tod und das Mädchen**, D531. **Die Vögel**, D691. **Der Zwerg**, D771

Florian Boesch *bar* **Malcolm Martineau** *pf*
Onyx **Ⓐ ONYX4149 (74' • DDD • T/t)**



'Slow and soft' were dominant epithets in David Patrick Stearns's review of Florian Boesch's earlier Schubert recital (Hyperion, 3/14). In this follow-up disc, Boesch confirms himself as the baritone's answer to pianist Mitsuko Uchida, daring a range of hushed dynamics in Schubert that seem to echo the composer's reported words: 'Sometimes it seems as if I do not belong to this world at all.' On rare occasions here – at the climaxes of 'Gruppe aus dem Tartarus' and a mesmerisingly eerie 'Der Zwerg' – he unleashes his full, bright resonance. But choosing songs that are overwhelmingly reflective, his favoured modes are understatement, inwardness, otherworldliness. Time and again the listener feels like an eavesdropper on a private meditation.

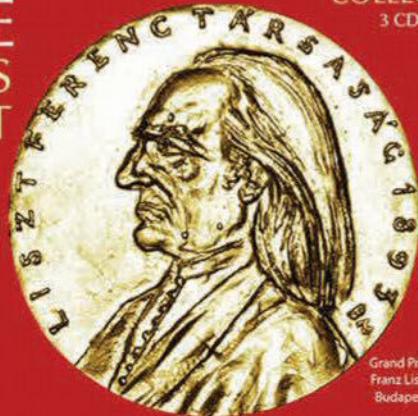
In tandem with the ever-perceptive Malcolm Martineau (a model of clarity, and



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Waldstein, Appassionata, Les Adieux

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especially good at animating and colouring Schubert's bass-lines), Boesch's concentrated *Innigkeit* can be haunting, above all in the many songs of loneliness, alienation and sorrowful regret. 'Litanei' is lovely in its simplicity and gentle intimacy; Boesch deploys a disembodied, abstracted tone to moving effect in Mayrhofer's 'Abendstern' and the desolate Platen song 'Die Liebe hat gelogen' (both poems of the homosexual artist as rejected outsider); and, with sensitive timing and colouring, he and Martineau create something memorable out of 'Der Gott und die Bajadere', which on the page seems an all-too-ingenuous setting of Goethe's compassionate, far-seeing parable.

Boesch tends to approach Lieder from the perspective of *prima le parole, dopo la musica*, rarely placing a premium on a broad, truly bound legato. I liked his treatment of 'An die Musik' as an intimate confession, shorn of any whiff of sanctity, while craving a more generous 'bowing' of Schubert's glorious melody, here and in an otherwise hypnotic 'Nachtviole'. Elsewhere – say, in the siren lure of 'Der Fischer' – Boesch can overdo the whispered semi-*parlando*, with cadences shaded to near-inaudibility. For my taste he is too laid-back in two other Goethe favourites, 'Heidenröslein' and an unusually swift 'Geheimes', which cry out for a touch of excited eagerness and (in the latter) a conspiratorial twinkle. That said, this new disc contains many compelling performances, not least 'Der Tod und das Mädchen', where the dying girl is fragile rather than feverish and Death's words, sung *ppp*, are eerily ambiguous rather than comforting. And midway through a recital where so much is soft, musing and secretive, a jauntily characterised 'Fischerweise' – a feel-good song if ever there was – comes as a perfect pick-me-up. **Richard Wigmore**

Schütz

Johannespassion, SWV481. Litania, 'Kyrie eleison'. Unser Herr Jesus Christus in der Nacht, da er verraten ward, SWV495. Ach Herr, du Sohn Davids, SWVAnh2

Jan Kobow ten Evangelist **Harry van der Kamp** bass
Jesus Ulrike Hofbauer, Marie Luise Werneburg
sops Friedemann Condé bass **Lee Santana** theo
Frauke Hess vion **Ludger Rémy** org **Dresden**
Chamber Choir / Hans-Christoph Rademann
Carus (CARUS83 270 (56' • DDD • T/t)



Along with most of his other narrative works, Schütz's three Passion settings date from the last decade of his life. Famously, they are in German and exclude instrumental

participation, so that the bulk of the musical argument, focused on the role of the Evangelist, consists of monody of Schütz's own devising. The *St John Passion* is shorter and less heavily populated than the composer's better-known *St Matthew*, the dramatic tension residing chiefly in the triangle of Christ, Pilate and the Crowd, with Pilate as the fulcrum. One might say that the phrygian mode is itself a protagonist of sorts, its potential for instability driving the narrative forwards.

This is the first of the Schütz Passions that Rademann's ensemble have committed to disc. They frame it with motets related to the Passion story, most notably the re-enactment of the Last Supper, SWV495. This characteristically astute programming contrasts with the approach taken by Ars Nova under Paul Hillier, who have issued all six narrative works (including the *Christmas* and *Resurrection* Stories and the *Seven Last Words*) as a four-disc box-set with no 'fillers'. Aided by their preferred acoustic, Ars Nova have the brighter sound, but the soloists' persistent and at times distracting vibrato contrasts more sharply with the chorus's straight tone than in Rademann's reading, which I suspect will wear rather better as a result. (My preferences in this matter were largely formed by Hillier's account of the *St Matthew Passion* with the Hilliards, in which everything was delivered straight and none the worse for it.) It will be fascinating to compare the two ensembles as Rademann and co reach the Matthew and Luke settings; here, in any case, their choice of accompanying motets is affectingly rendered (yes, even the Litany) and perfectly judged.

Fabrice Fitch

St John Passion – selected comparison:
Ars Nova Copenhagen, Hillier
(8/10) (DACA) 8 226093 or 8 204035

Vivaldi

'Laudate!'
Ascende laeta, RV534^a. *Juditha triumphans*, RV644^a – *Transit aetas*; *Umbrae carae*; *Vivat in pace*. *Laudate pueri*, RV600^a. *O qui caeli teraeque serenitas*, RV631. *Sinfonias* – RV125; 'Al Santo Sepolcro', RV169
^a**Johanette Zomer** sop **Tulipa Consort**
Channel Classics (CCS38216 (72' • DDD)



This marks the debut recording of the Tulipa Consort, founded by the experienced Dutch soprano Johanette Zomer, whose discography has often been distinguished by her stylistic integrity and intelligent communication of poetry.

Ascende laeta was probably designed as an 'introduzione' to the large-scale *Dixit Dominus* (RV595) written for the Ospedale della Pietà in about 1715. The amiable string-playing and Zomer's easy gracefulness scamper along together lightly in the motet's conclusion 'Sternite, Angeli', which refers to the ascended Virgin being praised by the flowers of the meadows and shepherds; perhaps the bagpipe drone bass notes could have had a shade more rustic presence but the violins in thirds imitating pastoral recorders are played with charming fantasy. This segues seamlessly into arias from *Juditha triumphans* (1716); the title-heroine's contemplation 'Transit aetas' is accompanied with gentle sensuality by delicate pizzicato strings and mandolin, and a pair of soft recorders combine rapturously with Zomer's subtly sensual phrasing for the Assyrian captain Vagaus's gorgeous evocation of evening breezes ('Umbrae carae').

Sustained yet intimate lyricism also captivates in the slow aria 'Rosa quae moritur' at the heart of the motet *O qui caeli teraeque serenitas* (probably written in Rome in about 1723–24). After a glut of such thoughtful beauties, the earliest of Vivaldi's three settings of *Laudate pueri* (RV600, c1715) grants an opportunity for animated vigour and extrovert theatricality – although the more reflective moments make the most profound impressions, such as the dialogue between Zomer and violinist Lidewij van der Voort in the doxology.

It is poor that Channel Classics neither includes the sung texts nor lists the aria titles in the track-listing (the mere citing of tempo markings is unhelpful). Thank goodness for Hyperion's generous provision online of Michael Talbot's materials for The King's Consort's Vivaldi sacred music series. **David Vickers**

Wolf

'Kennst du das Land?'
Agnes. Anakreons Grab. An eine Äolsharfe. Bei einer Trauung. Die Bekehrte. Blumengruss.
Elfenlied. Er ist's. Erstes Liebeslied eines Mädchens. Frühling über's Jahr. Im Frühling. Kennst du das Land. Der Knabe und das Immelein. Mausefallensprüchlein. Mignon I–III. Nixe Binsefuss. Die Spröde. Ein Stündlein wohl vor Tag. Das verlassene Mägdelein. Verschwiegene Liebe. Wiegenlied im Sommer
^a**Sophie Karthäuser** sop **Eugene Asti** pf
Harmonia Mundi (HMC90 2245 (60' • DDD • T/t)



A lovely Handel and Mozart singer, Sophie Karthäuser here proves herself a



Sophie Karthäuser performing with Eugene Asti at the Oxford Lieder Festival; they have recorded a selection of Wolf songs for Harmonia Mundi

natural in Lieder. In a discography dominated by tenors and (especially) baritones, her all-Wolf recital, centred on settings of Mörike and Goethe, is doubly welcome.

Karthäuser's choice of songs, too, couldn't be more apt. In her Mörike selection she mixes a handful of favourites with cherishable rarities such as the desolate 'Agnes', with its sadly tolling ostinato, and 'Nixe Binsefuss', a mischievous fairy scherzo that sounds like refracted Mendelssohn. With her fresh, limpid soprano and sharp feeling for character and nuance, she gives unfailing delight in the these settings, whether in her conspiratorial sense of fun in the children's song 'Mausfallensprüchlein' and the two elfin vignettes 'Nixe Binsefuss' and 'Elfenlied' – the comedy of the latter deliciously timed – or her mingled simplicity and acuteness of observation in 'Das verlassene Mägdelein': the weary stressing of 'muss' near the opening, the new bleakness in the tone as she gazes into the fire ('Ich schaue so darein'), the flare of accusation at 'Plötzlich, da kommt es mir'. Karthäuser spins a seraphically floated

line in the sublime 'An eine Äolsharfe', while at the other end of the spectrum the Hogarthian portrait of a loveless wedding, 'Bei einer Trauung', is sung with an unexaggerated sneer that the acerbic Wolf would surely have relished.

A measure of innocent simplicity is crucial in the Mignon songs, where Goethe's waif becomes an etherealised Isolde; yet Karthäuser also musters deeper colourings and reserves of passion for 'Nur wer die Sehnsucht kennt' (its tempo fluctuations beautifully judged) and 'Kennst du das Land', with each successive climax finely graded. Elsewhere in the Goethe songs charm, lightness and grace prevail – not epithets normally associated with Wolf. The pair of sublimated folksongs, 'Die Spröde' and the *valse triste* 'Die Bekehrte', are specially delectable, the former blithely flirtatious from both singer and pianist, the latter deeply touching in its unforced pathos.

Throughout, Eugene Asti, recorded with proper prominence, is a model partner, commentator and animator ('accompanist' is an insult in Wolf): subtly fluid in rhythm, hyper-sensitive to the flux

of Wolf's liquefent harmonies and conjuring textures of gossamer delicacy in songs such as 'Frühling über's Jahr', with its diaphonous bell chimes, and the two elfin sketches. The rare, early setting of Robert Reinick's 'Wiegenlied im Sommer' – Wolf at his most Schumannesque – makes a beguiling envoi. In sum, a recital to delight all Wolf lovers, and an ideal entrée for those still to be converted to the peculiar richness and intensity of his art.

Richard Wigmore

'Bouillabaisse'

Blavet Troisième Livre de sonates – Sonata terza
Jacquet de la Guerre Semélé – Cantate avec
 Simphonie
Rameau Cantate pour le jour de la
 fête de Saint Louis
Traditional La fille au roi
 Louis. La Furstenberg. Une jeune fillette. Quand
 je menai les chevaux boire
Visée Prélude

Ensemble 392

Fra Bernardo (F) FB1603721 (47' • DDD • T)



There's nothing ichthyological, or even marine, about the contents, so the title

'Bouillabaisse' is a puzzle; the name of the group is taken from 'French opera pitch'. Although the disc might seem short measure at a little over 45 minutes, Ensemble 392 offer a pleasantly varied programme that can be enjoyed at a sitting. The main work is Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre's *Semélé*, probably published around 1715. The narrator sets the scene – Semele, though warned by Cupid, wishes to see Jupiter in all his glory – and wraps up the story with a moral. In between, Semele complains to Cupid, after which Jupiter's thunderbolt leads to her being burnt to death. An excellent opportunity for imaginative musical illustration, but Jacquet de la Guerre muffs it. Jupiter's arrival is marked by a dainty gavotte, and the music for the fire that consumes the unfortunate princess is decorous indeed; fortunately, Marie-Sophie Pollak's bright soprano, the bite of Julia Stocker's flute and the strumming of Johannes Ötzbrugger's theorbo combine to give it a decent amount of welly.

The anonymous text of Rameau's *Cantate pour le jour de St Louis* was surely aimed at the reigning monarch (Louis XV) as well as the saint (Louis IX). A brief, syncopated prelude introduces the opening recitative, after which the singer launches on a *da capo* air that begins 'Let all unite in doing honour to one to whom my heart owes its blessings'. The flute (substituting, reasonably enough, for the violin) then twitters delightfully as the birds are invited to join in.

The other vocal items are simple chansons, delivered simply. The gentle melancholy of 'La fille au roi Louis' has a counterpart in the middle movement of the sonata from Michel Blavet's Op 3 set. This, the most substantial of the disc's three instrumental pieces, is given a fine performance by Julia Stocker and the fourth member of the ensemble, harpsichordist Tizian Naef. The latter's article in the booklet is translated; the texts are not. Another puzzle is the booklet's cover: three American sisters from the 1920s, perched on a toy car. But this is civilised, undemanding music, expertly performed. **Richard Lawrence**

'Chorus vel organa'

Music from the Lost Palace of Westminster'

Anonymous Felix namque. Sancte Dei pretiose

Cornys Magnificat Ludford Lady Mass Cycle.

Missa Lapidaverunt Stephanum - Agnus Dei

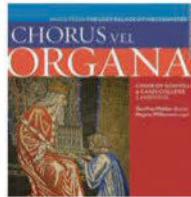
Sheppard Sancte Dei pretiose

Choir of Gonville & Caius College, Cambridge /

Geoffrey Webber with James Leitch,

Magnus Williamson org

Delphian (CD) DCD34158 (67' • DDD • T/t)



There is much to be celebrated here as early music scholarship inspires joyful

performances from the Choir of Gonville & Caius College. The album presents pre-Reformation liturgical music for the Feast of St Stephen (December 26) alongside plainsong and its alternatives: chanting in chords, faburden and organ improvisations. Consequently, the jewel in this particular crown is the St Teilo organ, a reconstruction in the early English 16th-century style following research from John Harper at Bangor University's 'The Experience of Worship' project. Organist Magnus Williamson revives improvisatory techniques appropriate for both plainsong and polyphony, leading to an album whose polyphonic delights are embedded in a liturgical soundscape likely to reflect practice in the chapel of St Stephen during Henry VIII's reign.

The album takes its name from the opening track: 'chorus vel organa' is the rubric given in a Sarum Antiphoner of 1519 indicating 'choir or organ'. The organ is tuned to a pungent, modified mean-tone temperament and replete with sprightly chiffs fronting each note. The singers gravitate towards this tuning and immediacy, especially in the Lady Mass Cycle where Magnus Williamson's dexterously improvised versets alternate with firm, robust polyphony. This leaves the somewhat polite *a cappella* performance of Ludford's (c1485-c1557) *Gloria* in a rather incongruous corner since his polyphonic arches also need, in my opinion, an altogether more robust approach. The arrival of the full choir at the phrase 'Gratias agimus tibi', for instance, lacks gravitas and the spacious final 'Amen' leaves me wistful for the searing tuning of The Cardinall's Musick (ASV) with altos *en chamade*.

Yet Cornys' (d1502 or 1465-1523) *Magnificat* is spectacular. Here, purposeful phrasing serves up cadences with pleasing aplomb. It is surely testament to the rich heritage of British vocal performance that young singers can assimilate these styles so quickly and expertly. If ever there was a moment to bask in the achievements of the early music revival and gaze in wonderment at its promising future, then this is it.

Edward Breen

'Helper and Protector'

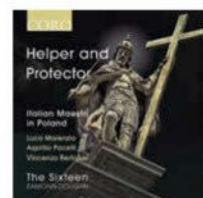
'Italian Maestri in Poland'

Bertolusi Ave verum corpus. Sancta Maria,

mater Dei. Peccantem me quotidie. Timor Domini **Marenzio** Iniquos odio habui. Iubilate Deo omnis terra. Missa super Iniquos odio habui **Pacelli** Beata estis. Christus resurgens. Gaudent in caelis. Media nocte

The Sixteen / Eamonn Duggan

Coro (CD) COR16141 (68' • DDD • T/t)



By the fourth volume of a series delving into the forgotten repertoire of

16th-century Poland, you might expect The Sixteen and associate conductor Eamonn Dougan to be scraping the bottom of the musical barrel. Instead, they're just getting to the good stuff.

Anyone who has been following the series will recognise some names here. Asprilio Pacelli and Vincenzo Bertolusi – both Italian composers lured from Italy to work at the court of Poland's Sigismund III in Kraków – return in a selection of motets, joined by fellow expat Luca Marenzio, whose *Missa super Iniquos* is the big draw here.

Until recently, this attractive Mass setting, with its two echoing choirs, existed only in part. The *Kyrie* and *Gloria* were known and recorded (most recently by Caritas and James Grossmith in 2000), while the rest of the work was lost. Now rediscovered, and edited by Barbara Przybyszewska-Jarmińska, the Mass is presented complete for the first time here. It is based on Marenzio's own eight-part motet, which establishes the pattern of the two echoing, Italianate choirs that is mirrored (to varying degrees and with an impressive range of effects) through the various movements. The effect is coherent, sometimes to the point of anonymity, but the clarity of Dougan's glossy choral textures allows the music's rhythmic animation to penetrate, and pacing is carefully calibrated to balance moment-by-moment drama with a longer musical arc.

It's a wise choice also to frame the *Credo* with two Bertolusi motets (*Sancta Maria, succurre miseris* and *Peccantem me quotidie*). Among the choppy double-choir dialogue of the Marenzio, Bertolusi's unending polyphonic lines and altogether darker, more chromatic palette are a welcome contrast, almost Lassus-like in their intensity. Among the lighter Pacelli motets, the standout is *Media nocte*, with the textural light and shade of verse sections beautifully shaped by single voices.

Alexandra Coglan

REISSUES

Mike Ashman revisits some classic Decca recitals and **Jeremy Nicholas** dives into a Romantic piano concerto set

Great voices

Following imaginative leads from Decca/Universal's overseas branches in Australia (Eloquence) and Mexico (Most Wanted Recitals), the company's Decca Sound historical reissue boxes now reach their fifth issue with a large chronological survey of their post-1945 singer roster, from Suzanne Danco to Joseph Calleja. Most of the 55 CDs take as their basis the recital LPs with which new signings are still being awarded their spurs by the company. To the first 37 discs (up to the 1970s) has been added bonus material from other contemporary releases, providing a contrast in repertoire or excerpts from complete opera recordings. Especially for the earlier releases this adds up to generous playing times around the 80-minute mark.

Mastering of this wide range of material is credited to Paschal Byrne and Craig Thompson, leading lights of The Audio Archiving Company Ltd. Their work draws on a golden age of producers and engineers – starting with the likes of John Culshaw, Gordon Parry and Kenneth Wilkinson and coming up to Michael Haas and Philip Siney – and the consistent use of familiar and successful venues in Vienna, London, Geneva and Rome. The remasterings sound well throughout, in addition to contributing – as befits a historical survey – to a prospectus of the changing styles and tastes in recording the accompanied voice from the early 1950s to the 2000s. Sample in this respect the balance accorded Fernando Corena's 1956 recital in Florence (Italian items) and Geneva (French items). As the soloist and the 'star' he's placed right downstage with the orchestra sounding as if far upstage, or even in the next room. Everything appears to be sung as loudly as possible, yet the results (especially in Offenbach's 'Pif Paf Pouf' or Donizetti's 'Udite, udite, o rustici') are compulsively funny.



The various Decca technical teams certainly possessed the ability to lure performances from artists in the studio. Passing through the 60-odd years collected here is to marvel at the sheer liveliness and standard of the work preserved. The listener still needs recovery time after the 'event' (CD15, track 5) of Joan Sutherland's 1959 *Lucia* Mad Scene, the beginning of the 'La Stupenda' legend. What top notes! (And the ensuing 'Casta diva' and *Lakmé* Bell Song are hardly less hair-raising.)

Other discs marking the event of a career launch or international debut have survived less well. The (very) heavy repertoire – *Turandot*, *Macbeth*, *Aida*, *Manon Lescaut*'s death – that Hungarian star-from-nowhere Sylvia Sass was rushed to London's Kingsway Hall to record in February 1977 (CD35) has huge, over-the-top emotions, generous vibrato and vocalist-dictated tempos. Another evident accompaniment dictator is Mario del Monaco (CD6), making London's Walthamstow rafters ring in 1956 but becoming rhythmically stodgy in his needs for time and space to deliver held high notes. (It spoils his interesting choice of Halévy's 'Rachel, quand du Seigneur la grâce tutélaire', although you can certainly hear why Wieland Wagner wanted him for Lohengrin and Siegmund.) Giuseppe di Stefano is already showing signs of strain in his 1958 *Andrea Chénier* and *Tosca* (CD14) and displays the eccentric

French seemingly de rigueur for Italian tenors but the closing 11 Neapolitan Songs are serious compensation.

Elsewhere the names live up to their reputations and the extra items are a treat. Lisa della Casa's Lieder recital (CD8) turns to Richard Strauss, the swift, airy Karl Böhm-led *Four Last Songs* and the Arabella that the ageing composer said she was born to sing. The Ferrier disc (CD3) moves us from 'Klever Kaff' at home with Bach and Handel to that sovereign 'Um Mitternacht' abroad with Bruno Walter and the VPO brass. Gérard Souzay can sound straightlaced in serious arias by Gounod and Berlioz (CD10) but is huge fun in Offenbach's 'Je suis Coppélus', Bizet and Fauré songs.

Apart from its Who's Who completeness Decca's collection surprises most with less ardently promoted names. Virginia Zeani (born 1925), a famous Violetta, was never much recorded but shows off fabulous intonation and line in works by all the major 19th-century Italians (CD11). Jennifer Vyvyan, Britten's first Governess, Lady Rich and Tytania, shows equal control and passion in tricky Haydn and Mozart concert arias (CD12) as well as scenes from the English Opera Group *The Turn of the Screw* recording. Two last pleasures: the young Kiri Te Kanawa in the Purcell/Britten *Blessed Virgin's Expostulation* (CD45) and the sheer rightness and rhythm (also in the orchestra under Edward Downes) of Regina Resnik's *Carmen* highlights (CD16).

The booklet needs an index, and its good booklet-note some CD references, but the set (retailing for about £80) is hugely recommended and does repay chain listening. **Mike Ashman**

THE RECORDING

Decca Sound: 55 Great Vocal Recitals

Decca ⑧ (55 discs) 478 967-9

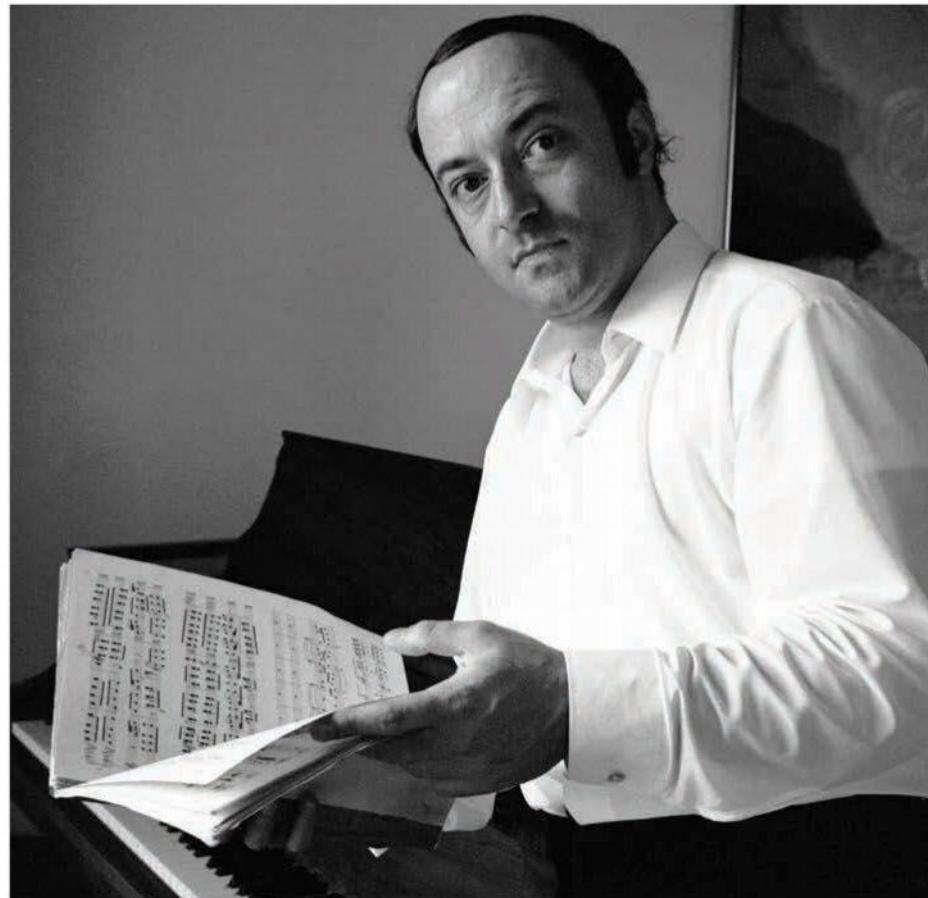
Pianistic fireworks at a knock-down price

Be still my beating heart! For a fledgling pianorak in the late 1960s and early '70s there was no sight that gladdened the eye more than the gold and black livery of a new Vox Candide recording. Each one, you knew, would contain another first recording of another forgotten Romantic piano concerto, accompanied sometimes by solo works as fillers. It was the start of a lifelong addiction.

The pianist who provided most of the thrills was Michael Ponti, a dome-headed bear of a man able to toss off page after page of the most cruelly demanding writing with a) the utmost ease, b) as though he had been playing them all his life, and c) with complete stylistic assurance. Ponti just 'got it' – the right man for the right repertoire at the right time. The Vox/Vox Candide/Turnabout recordings remained unchallenged for two decades when Hyperion's Romantic Piano Concerto series was launched using a roster of world-class soloists. Ponti did it all on his own, a kind of one-man Howard Shelley/Jonathan Plowright/Marc-André Hamelin.

To save you (and Brilliant Classics) the trouble, the 40-CD box – which sells for about £70 – contains 107 works for piano and orchestra by exactly 70 different composers. A significant number of Ponti's recordings are reissued here after many years absence from the catalogue. Dipping in at random to start this review, I took out CD3 with three concertos played by him that I hadn't heard for years (my LPs of Moscheles's Fourth, Hiller's F sharp minor and Litoff's *Concerto symphonique* No 3 are currently languishing in the garage). It was not just nostalgia and the re-acquaintance with old friends that delivered a series of spine tingles. Ponti's playing is simply electrifying and the way he galvanises his various partners into matching him every step of the way in fiery tempos and spot on tutti makes very exciting listening (never mind the odd bit of suspect tuning, such as the end of the Hiller slow movement). And that, surely, is the point of much of this music. Without that edge-of-the-seat element and a soloist who can 'sell' these often glitteringly superficial scores the whole experience falls flat.

The best ones stick out a mile. These include the three above and those by Henselt, Raff, and the second concertos of Scharwenka and MacDowell. Many performances have been superseded (Martin Galling's Hummel A minor by Stephen Hough's scintillating Chandos recording,



Michael Ponti, virtuoso extraordinaire, who opened our ears to so many of these concerto rarities

for instance, and Felijca Blumenthal's Clementi C major by Howard Shelley's new Hyperion disc) but often these Vox recordings remain either the best or only versions available. Some concertos are better than I remembered (Stavenhagen, Sinding – in which the piano receives a punishing pounding from Roland Keller); others are still complete non-starters (the Goetz and Mosonyi are particularly awful).

There are, in the way of these things, questionable inclusions and omissions. Neither Gershwin's one, Mendelssohn's two nor Saint-Saëns' five piano concertos can be described as 'rare'. Respighi's *Toccata* and *Concerto in modo misolidio* hardly qualify as 'Romantic', while Mason's *Prelude* and *Fugue*, and Tailleferre's *Ballade* are not 'concertos'. There are two versions of Saint-Saëns' *Africa* Fantasy (Gabriel Tacchino and Marylène Dosse) and two of Mendelssohn's *Capriccio brillant* (Ponti and Derek Han). The sound quality inevitably varies as much as the standard of soloists, both of which are lifeless at times but rarely in the same recording or enough to entirely spoil one's listening pleasure.

Brilliant's presentation, however, is

disappointing. The order in which the works appear seems completely arbitrary. The booklet is a cursory glide through the contents with none of the fascinating and scholarly notes that accompanied each LP. The only repertoire information is on the back of each cardboard cover and that is limited to the work's title, composer, artists and track numbers. That's all. Even then some essential annotation is missing entirely, such as the arrangement of Chopin's *Allegro de Concert* for piano and orchestra. Is it the one by Nicodé, Messager or Wilkomirski? (Actually it is the latter.) By no means are all the recordings 'performed by acclaimed pianists with internationally renowned orchestras and conductors'.

There is, then, a disparity between the repertoire in this box (which is most likely to appeal to the piano connoisseur) and the presentation (which is suitable for the non-specialist browsing for a cheap gift). If the former, I should snap this up without delay. **Jeremy Nicholas**

THE RECORDING

Romantic Piano Concertos

Brilliant Classics ⑧ (40 discs) 95300BR

Opera



Richard Osborne listens to a Rossini Viaggio from Wildbad:

'The performance has a vividness and theatrical carry that confirm that Il viaggio is indeed a feast' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 93**



Mike Ashman revisits Janowski's PentaTone Ring from Berlin:

'He deserves credit for casting for vocal colour, individuality and rightness rather than playing safe' ► **REVIEW ON PAGE 95**

Gounod

Cinq-Mars

Mathias Vidal ten Le Marquis de Cinq-Mars
Véronique Gens sop La Princesse Marie de Gonzague
Tassis Christoyannis bar Le Conseiller de Thou
Andrew Foster-Williams bass-bar Le Père Joseph
André Heyboer bar Le Vicomte de Fontrailles
Norma Nahoun sop Marion Delorme
Marie Lenormand mez Ninon de L'Enclos/Un Berger
Jacques-Greg Belobo bass Le Roi/Le Chancelier
Andrew Lepri Meyer ten De Montmort/L'Ambassadeur
Matthias Ettmayer bass De Montrésor/Eustache
Wolfgang Klose ten Die Brienne
Bavarian Radio Chorus; Munich Radio Orchestra / Ulf Schirmer
Ediciones Singulares F ② ES1024
(138' • DDD • S/T/t)
Recorded live at the Prinzregententheater, Munich, January 25, 2015



What with *The Musketeers* and *Versailles* on BBC television, 17th-century France is on a roll at the moment. It can only be a matter of time before some producer dusts down Stanley J Weyman's *Under the Red Robe*. And here, the latest in the Palazzetto Bru Zane's enterprising series of little-known French operas, is Gounod's *Cinq-Mars*. It is based on the novel by Alfred de Vigny, published in 1826. Cardinal Richelieu doesn't appear in the opera, as he does in the book, but Père Joseph, the original *éminence grise*, has an important role. There are other historical characters whom one could imagine in a Hollywood epic but who are, sad to say, absent from the opera: for instance the execution of Cinq-Mars is described in a letter that Corneille reads to Milton, both men having appeared earlier in the company of Descartes.

The story of the opera revolves round the Marquis de Cinq-Mars and his fellow conspirators, who plot to rid France of the over-powerful Richelieu. Cinq-Mars is spurred on to rebellion when he is

informed by Père Joseph that, despite having the king's blessing on his proposed marriage, he is to yield the princess Marie de Gonzague to the king of Poland. Ignoring the warning of his friend de Thou, Cinq-Mars organises an alliance with Spain and is condemned to death for treason. Père Joseph tricks Marie into accepting the king of Poland in order to obtain a pardon; but Cinq-Mars and de Thou are executed anyway, Marie's rescue attempt coming too late.

When Léon Carvalho took over the direction of the Opéra-Comique, he lost no time in commissioning an opera from Gounod. *Cinq-Mars* was premiered on April 5, 1877, fully 10 years after the composer's previous opera, *Roméo et Juliette*. The staging was lavish, the reception respectful, but despite clocking up around 60 performances in 10 months the opera soon disappeared. The judgement of the critics of the day was that, partaking of both genres, the piece fell between the stools of *grand opéra* and *opéra comique*.

The critics were right; to which one might add, adapting Boulez on Shostakovich vis-à-vis Mahler, that some of the music is 'a second, or even third pressing' of *Faust* and *Roméo et Juliette* and that there's more than a touch of Verdi's Carlos and Rodrigue in the friendship between Cinq-Mars and de Thou. But there are vigorous choruses, including a Weberish hunting number, a charming divertissement and a fine, chromatically inflected air for the implacable Père Joseph. And it's extremely well performed by Ulf Schirmer and his Bavarian forces. The Cinq-Mars and Marie are both French. Mathias Vidal has an ideal voice for this repertoire: slightly reedy, with a pleasing fast vibrato. Véronique Gens finds all the gentleness and anxiety in her *cantilène*, 'Nuit resplendissante', and is splendidly spirited later on. Tassis Christoyannis and Andrew Foster-Williams are perfect as devoted friend and scheming priest respectively, and Norma Nahoun makes an enchanting courtesan. Full texts and translations in the familiar book-cum-disc format. **Richard Lawrence**

Meyerbeer

Dinorah

Patrizia Ciofi sop Dinorah
Etienne Dupuis bar Hoël
Philippe Talbot ten Corentin
Elebenita Kajtazi sop Goatherd
Christina Sidak mez Goatgirl
Seth Carico bass-bar Huntsman
Gideon Poppe ten Reaper
Chorus and Orchestra of the Deutsche Oper Berlin / Enrique Mazzola
CPO F ② CPO555 014-2 (134' • DDD • S/T/t)
Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin, September 29 - October 1, 2014



Meyerbeer needs his operatic champions. *Robert le diable* was poorly served by

Laurent Pelly's 2012 production at Covent Garden, but the Deutsche Oper is taking up the challenge, currently in the midst of a Meyerbeer cycle which began with *Vasco da Gama* in 2015. The year before, it presented a concert performance of *Dinorah* at Berlin's Philharmonie, released here on CPO.

An *opéra comique* in three acts to a libretto by Jules Barbier and Michel Carré, it was originally entitled *Le pardon de Ploërmel* ('The Pardon of Ploërmel').

Dinorah is a Breton peasant girl who has gone mad following the disappearance of her bridegroom, the goatherd Hoël, a year earlier when a storm interrupted their wedding. In reality, Hoël has gone off in search of treasure, trapped under a vow of silence. A year on, he returns to claim first the treasure, then his bride.

It's a slight opera but its most famous aria, 'Ombre légère', in which Dinorah sings to her shadow, was recorded by Maria Callas, Joan Sutherland and Lily Pons among others. Anyone used to Meyerbeer in *grand opéra* mode may be surprised to find he does pastoral charm rather well, with merrymaking peasants, bucolic woodcutters and rustic clarinets for bagpipes. Character solos for a hunter, a reaper and two herders hold up the action in Act 3 but Meyerbeer's



Sally Matthews as Konstanze at Glyndebourne, with Franck Saurel as Pasha Selim in David McVicar's production of *Die Entführung aus dem Serail*

score is most enjoyable. Enrique Mazzola spins gossamer touches from the Deutsche Oper's orchestra.

Patrizia Ciofi is plucky in the title-role. Her opening aria finds Dinorah still in her bridal gown, searching for her little white goat. Ciofi lacks a little sparkle here and is cloudy in her lower register but sings strongly in the forlorn romance 'Le vieux sorcier'. She is breathless with excitement in 'Ombre légère', even if her coloratura isn't technically perfect, and neither is the trill on which she closes. For Opera Rara, Deborah Cook is a stronger Dinorah, but the rest of the cast cannot match this new recording.

There is plenty of virile bite to French Canadian baritone Etienne Dupuis's singing as Hoël, especially in his paean to gold, pearls and rubies. His wiry baritone is a little strained at the top in his Act 3 romance 'Ah! mon remords te venge', but his is an impressive voice. Dupuis strikes a good partnership with Philippe Talbot in the comic tenor role of Corentin, a timorous bagpiper, as they set off to claim the treasure. A drinking duet turns into a delightful 'Terzettino de la clochette' before Dinorah tumbles into an abyss. Miraculously, she survives. What's more, the bump on the head makes her forget the

past year and she wakes up thinking it's her wedding day – cue for a happy ending in this enjoyable recording. **Mark Pullinger**

Comparative version:

Judd (8/80, 4/94) (OPRA) ORCS*

Mozart



Die Entführung aus dem Serail

Sally Matthews sop..... Konstanze

Mari Eriksmoen sop..... Blonde

Edgaras Montvidas ten..... Belmonte

Brenden Gunnell ten..... Pedrillo

Tobias Kehrer bass..... Osmin

Franck Saurel spkr..... Pasha Selim

Jonas Cradock ten..... Klaas

The Glyndebourne Chorus; Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment / Robin Ticciati

Stage director David McVicar

Video director François Roussillon

Opus Arte (F) **DVD** OA1215D; (F) **Blu-ray** OABD7204D

(168' + 12' • NTSC • 16.9 • 1080p • DTS-HD MA5.1,

DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • S/s)



This is such an enjoyable production of Mozart's Turkish opera that it seems churlish to draw attention to its defects. So first of all, three cheers for

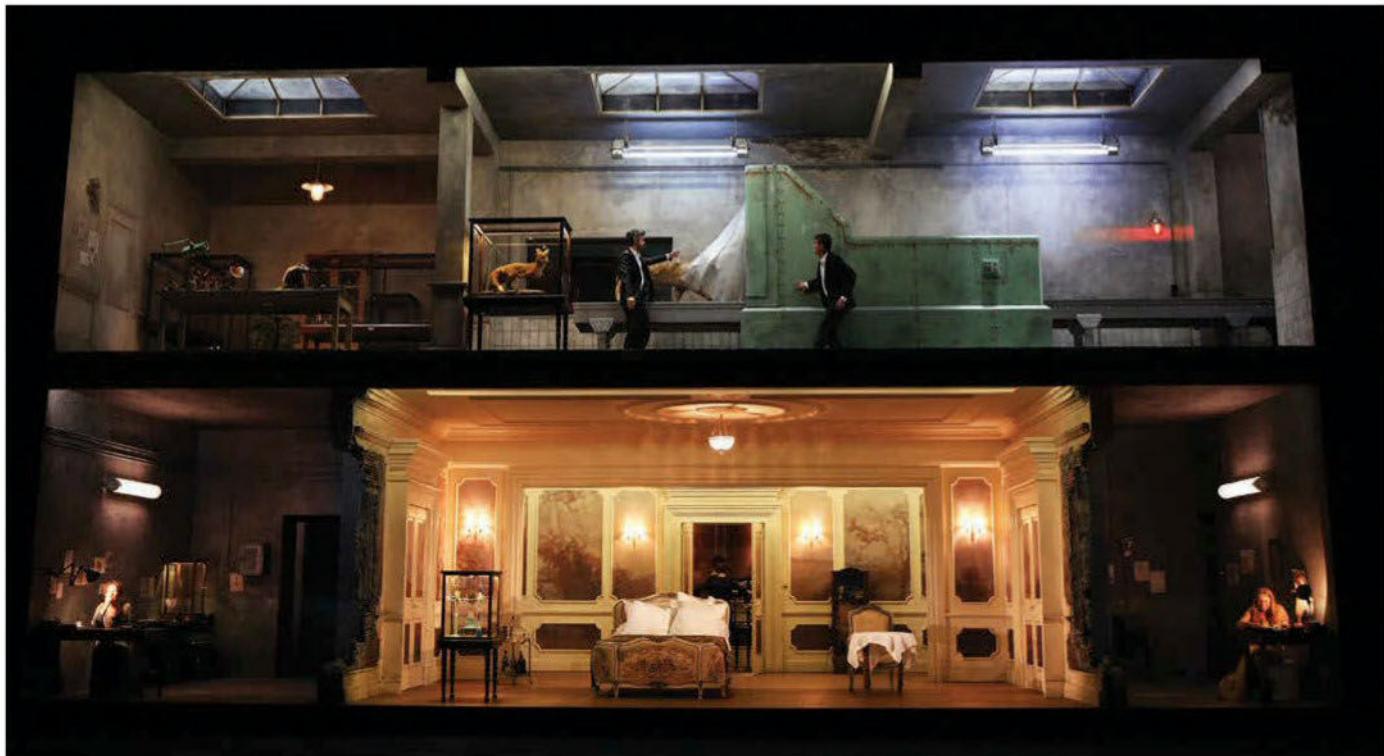
David McVicar, who by including most of the dialogue has restored the proper balance between speech and music. This has the remarkable effect of throwing the spotlight on to the usually almost marginal character of Pasha Selim, who is in love with his prisoner Konstanze but not given any music to sing. Quite rightly, McVicar reminds us that Selim is no Turk but a Spaniard who has converted to Islam. Despite this, he remains an Enlightenment figure who shows great forbearance by releasing his captives (and who has a wind band to play Mozart's B flat Serenade, a nice touch). But instead of seeking out a younger version of, say, Klaus Maria Brandauer, McVicar casts a piratical French actor (why?) whom he has stripping to the waist during 'Martern aller Arten'. Just as improbable, Konstanze is clearly attracted to the Pasha, frequently pawing him, despite there being no justification for this in the music. Other irritations include the presence on stage of characters who should have exited, or not been there at all, and too much shouting when the captives are trying to escape at dead of night.

Enough! The visual aspect is gorgeous, Vicki Mortimer's set, with its many scene changes, evoking a romantic view of the

GRAMOPHONE Collector

HANDEL IN THE OPERA HOUSE

Alexandra Coghlan watches a trio of Handel works – two operas and an oratorio – in very different stagings



The director Katie Mitchell brings an 'emphasis on psychological truthfulness' to her production of *Alcina* at the Aix Festival

Opera on film is an awkward compromise of an art form. At worst it's just an architect's plan, an aide memoire that preserves the outline of a production but nothing more. At best, though, it can actually heighten the dramatic essence of a show, bringing us – both literally and figuratively – closer to core of the action. Three new Handel DVDs reflect this strange disparity, ranging from the adequate to the theatrically outstanding.

If ever there was an opera production made for the probing, roving eye of the camera, it's Katie Mitchell's *Alcina*, originally staged in 2015 at the Aix Festival. The director's signature visual detail, coupled with her emphasis on psychological truthfulness, means that every close-up yields more intrigue, more insight into Handel's troubled cast of characters. Wide shots allow our eyes to drift over Mitchell's broken-down doll's house of a set. Five rooms, split over two levels, are filled with almost constant action; and though the panelled and painted Georgian salon is the only one fully lit, it's elsewhere – in the crumbling, decaying 'backstage' spaces of sorceress

Alcina's magic domain – that the real interest lies.

Double-casting both Alcina and Morgana, Mitchell pulls off a sleight of hand as bold as it is telling, giving us both the illusion of youth and beauty (in singers Patricia Petibon and Anna Prohaska) and the reality of decrepit old age (actresses Juliet Alderdice and Jane Thorne). As the characters pass between rooms they also pass seamlessly between performers, exposing the fragile fabric of Alcina's sorcery.

For all that it's a magic opera, *Alcina* is, ultimately, a story of human psychology, of the illusions and horrors that exist in the mind. With the support of Andrea Marcon and the Freiburg Baroque Orchestra and a superb cast of singing actors (including a mesmerising Petibon, though her vocal tricks won't be to everyone's taste, Katarina Bradic's Bradamante and Philippe Jaroussky as a deliciously vapid Ruggiero), Mitchell's concept becomes heartbreakingly real – a portrait of women imprisoned in a palace and a narrative of their own making. When the camera creeps right in, refusing to blink away Alcina's sagging skin and greying hair, catching the self-

disgust in her eyes, no amount of beautiful melodies or spectacular ariosos can temper the devastation we feel along with her.

Ideas of decay also preoccupy Barrie Kosky in his Glyndebourne production of *Saul*, conducted by Ivor Bolton. Joachim Klein's queasy-beautiful lighting (only intensified on film) turns Kosky's visuals into a Caravaggio painting by way of Hieronymus Bosch. Everything in this rotting cornucopia of Baroque excess is exaggerated, leaving Christopher Purves's king isolated in emotions that, for all their confusion, are recognisably human and horribly vulnerable.

Inevitably losing some of the energy that made the show so compelling in the opera house, where the DVD gains is in the access it gives to the detail of Purves's astonishing central performance. Thoughts constantly flicker across his eyes, allowing the viewer access to an inner monologue supported by singing of such broken-down, ripped-up beauty that it makes the glossy, rounded tones of Iestyn Davies's David seem almost obscene – as they should. Handel's oratorio has never lived as dramatically as it does here, and a short additional documentary about the

production only adds to the many reasons to add this to your collection.

But where cameras only heighten the impact both *Alcina* and *Saul* had live, it's the original confusions and the excesses of Moshe Leiser and Patrice Caurier's *Giulio Cesare* that emerge uppermost. Reimagining Cesare (Andreas Scholl) as a shiny-suited Eurocrat, inspecting some war-torn colonial outpost, they throw every imperialist cliché at the audience in vain hope something will stick. Drilling rigs jostle with camouflage-clad warlords and a life-size plastic crocodile. It's facile, but above all it's confusing. There's just too much going on in Leiser and Caurier's action to grasp on a smaller screen, and too little dramatic hierarchy.

Cecilia Bartoli rises above it all, however (both musically and quite literally, on the warhead that carries her Cleopatra up and off into the wings during 'V'adoro pupille'). If her vocal delivery is sometimes mannered, occasionally self-indulgent, it's also a miracle of precise coloratura and glowing tone, manipulated for expressive effect as only she can. Who else could sing 'Piangerò' with a bag over their head, and pull it off?

Reportedly underpowered on stage, here Scholl comes across strongly in the balance, dispatching a manly 'Va tacito' filled with all his old warmth, and making a fine foil for Philippe Jaroussky's Christopher Robin-esque Sesto – all short trousers and querulous treble. But the surprise star here in this clutch of countertenors is Christophe Dumaux's grubby Tolomeo. Is it really necessary for him to masturbate to a porn magazine through an entire aria? Of course not. But his coloratura is so agile and tightly muscled that you all but forget the context. Add strong turns from Anne Sofie von Otter's Cornelia and Jochen Kowalski's cross-cast Nirena (complete with surprise aria), and it makes you wish that Salzburg had given this outstanding cast the production they deserved, instead of a lukewarm rehashing of Peter Sellars's ideas from 1990. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Handel *Alcina* Marcon, dir Mitchell **G**
Erato **F** **2** **DVD** 9029 59743-6;
F **BD** 9029 59743-5



Handel *Saul* Bolton, dir Kosky
Opus Arte **F** **DVD** OA1216D;
F **BD** OABD7205D



Handel *Giulio Cesare* Antonini,
dir Leiser & Caurier Decca
F **2** **DVD** 074 2856; **F** **BD** 074 3859

Orient: latticed screens, a garden with potted plants, a forbidding wall with a studded gate. Her costumes, Ottoman or Western, are of a comparably stylish aptness. In the pit, Robin Ticciati conducts the heroes of the OAE in a fleet account of the score that offsets some of the over-long pauses in the dialogue. In the accompanied recitatives a fortepiano can be heard delicately tinkling away.

Edgaras Montvidas acts rather better than he sings. His Belmonte is ardent, impatient and, at the end, utterly chastened. McVicar sensibly follows today's customary placing of 'Wenn der Freude Tränen fliessen' before rather than after the lovers are reunited – a surprising miscalculation on Mozart's part, though there is a link between dialogue and aria – but Montvidas is lacking in tenderness; 'Ich baue ganz', too, is on the heavy side. As his beloved Konstanze, on the other hand, Sally Matthews sings superbly: an anguished 'Traurigkeit' and, despite having to veer between self-defence and tenderness, a heroic 'Martern aller Arten'.

The servant couple are very well characterised. Brenden Gunnell is a pipe-smoking Pedrillo, clearly proud of his gardening. His 'who dares, wins' aria, 'Frisch zum Kampfe!', is confident, quite without the usual fearfulness. Mari Eriksmoen is a formidable Blonde. When the Pasha's old steward Osmin orders her to love him, her furious lecture on women's freedom leads to everything in her kitchen becoming a missile. I was in two minds about the Osmin. Tobias Kehrer looks too young, more like a Viking than a Turk, and he underplays Osmin's dangerousness. But he sings so wonderfully – 'O, wie will ich triumphieren', with resonant bottom Ds, is a triumph indeed – that you can't help but succumb to his portrayal.

If you'd prefer more traditional productions, Solti/Moshinsky (Warner) or Böhm/Everding (DG: live, not lip-synched) would serve very well. But – my reservations notwithstanding – Ticciati/McVicar is a delight. **Richard Lawrence**

Puccini



Gianni Schicchi
Plácido Domingo *bar* Gianni Schicchi
Andriana Chuchman *sop* Lauretta
Arturo Chacón-Cruz *ten* Rinuccio
Meredith Arwady *contr* Zita
Greg Fedderly *ten* Gherardo
Stacey Tappan *sop* Nella
Philip Cokorinos *bass-bar* Betto di Signa
Craig Colclough *bass-bar* Simone
Liam Bonner *bar* Marco
Peabody Southwell *mez* La Ciesca
E Scott Levin *bar* Spinelloccio

Kihun Yoon *bar* Notary
Daniel Armstrong *bar* Pinellino
Gabriel Vamvulescu *bass* Guccio
Los Angeles Opera Orchestra / Grant Gershon
Stage director **Woody Allen**
Video director **Matthew Diamond**
Sony Classical **F** **DVD** 88985 31508-9;
F **BD** 88985 31509-9 (59' • NTSC • 16:9 • 1080i •
DTS-HD MA5.1, DTS5.1 & LPCM stereo • 0 • s)
Recorded live, September 27 & October 3, 2015



You normally know what you're getting from a Woody Allen production when the black screen with the white credits pops up, to the tune of some old jazz standard. In his 2008 Los Angeles Opera production of Puccini's comedy, however, the veteran director cooked up a short video curtain-raiser accompanied by 'Funiculì, funiculà'. This zany showreel introduces 'Vitello Tonnato', 'Oriana Fellatio' and others in a 'Prosciutto e Melone Production'. Quick, pass the chianti!

This show is from Allen's bin-ends, not the vintage barrels. It's hard to know how much involvement the auteur had with this 2015 revival: Kathleen Smith Belcher is credited as associate director, and though the performance lasts under an hour, there are no DVD extras – not even an interview with Allen himself. And how disappointing that a film director's opera production has itself been filmed so poorly by Matthew Diamond.

So, the appeal here is not really Allen but Plácido Domingo, in another of his excursions into the baritone repertoire and one of his few light-hearted roles. But there's a gear-crunch when he saunters into this sepia 1950s Florence (handsome if cluttered sets by Santo Loquasto), because Allen's vision of *Schicchi* is a swanky gangland spiv, and Domingo has the same twinkle in his eye as if he's singing 'Granada' at the Baths of Caracalla. He plays *Schicchi* like he's in on the joke but doesn't know what the joke is, and there's little ripeness or brio to the voice either.

Perhaps another Allen, Thomas – who sang the role when the production was new – better understood where Woody was going. Here, though, Domingo's amiable blankness sets the tone: the comic sauce simmers but doesn't come to a boil. If everyone on stage – whether it's the grasping Donatis, the apparently criminal *Schicchi* or even his hard-nosed daughter (it's hard to believe that Andriana Chuchman's brassy Lauretta just *kissed* Rinuccio when they went to Fiesole) – is on

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The Donatis await the arrival of Plácido Domingo's Gianni Schicchi at Los Angeles Opera, in Woody Allen's production of Puccini's comedy

the take, then the denouement feels pretty empty. As if Woody realises that, there's a final twist on the twist: I found it a jarring miscalculation, although the Angelenos seemed to love it.

The orchestra under Grant Gershon bowl along emphatically. There are some good cameos, including Peabody Southwell's sex-bomb portrayal of La Ciesca, Craig Colclough's sly Simone and Meredith Arwady's formidable Zita, powerfully delivered in a foghorn-alto. Yet neither Chuchman's Lauretta nor Arturo Chacón-Cruz's Rinuccio thrill in their big arias: more missed opportunities for Italian sunshine in a spag-bol of a show. **Neil Fisher**

Rossini

Il viaggio a Reims

| | |
|---|------------------------|
| Laura Giordano sop..... | Corinna |
| Alessandra Marianelli sop..... | Madama Cortese |
| Sofia Mchedlishvili sop..... | Contessa di Folleville |
| Marianna Pizzolato contr..... | Marchesa Melibea |
| Bogdan Mihai ten..... | Cavalier Belfiore |
| Maxim Mironov ten..... | Conte di Libenskof |
| Mirco Palazzi bass..... | Lord Sidney |
| Bruno De Simone bass..... | Don Profondo |
| Bruno Praticò bass..... | Barone di Trombonok |
| Gezim Myshtekë bass..... | Don Alvaro |
| Camerata Bach Choir, Poznań; Virtuosi Brunensis / Antonino Fogliani | |

Naxos ⑤ ③ 8 660382/4 (157' • DDD • S)
Recorded live at the Königliches Kurtheater, Bad Wildbad, Germany, July 8, 10 & 12, 2014



'This opera is a feast' was Stendhal's judgement on *Il viaggio a Reims*, though this sophisticated entertainment, written at the time of Charles X's coronation in Reims in 1825, was never, strictly speaking, an opera.

Rossini, who thought it a dead duck commercially, quickly withdrew it and reused some of its best music for a real comic opera, *Le comte Ory* (Paris, 1828). Similarly, after the entertainment's rediscovery and reassembly by Janet Johnson and Philip Gossett, no one thought that the 1984 Pesaro Festival production, and the superlative Abbado recording which derived from it, would readily be repeated. Not the least of the challenges is that

Il viaggio – part vocal showcase, part sardonic take on European nationalism and the Bourbon dynasty itself – needs 13 front-rank singers, preferably Italian.

Yet, surprisingly, it did take on a new life. While a number of leading opera houses staged it, and music conservatoires used it as

graduate entertainment, director Dario Fo retained the music but rewrote the text as an unashamedly anti-royalist tract.

Recorded at the 'Rossini in Wildbad' Festival in 2014 as part of the re-dedication of Wildbad's Royal Kurtheater, the new Naxos set is part of that unexpected afterlife. The Wildbad cast is a decent one, with better tenors than Pesaro – Wildbad's Maxim Mironov clearly edges out Pesaro's Francisco Araiza as the jealous Russian Count Libenskof – and a quintet of basses and bass-baritones who give Pesaro's formidable team of Ramey, Raimondi, Dara, Nucci and Surjan a decent run for its money.

It's on the distaff side that the new set is outclassed, not because the Wildbad soloists are in any way inadequate but because the Pesaro women are pretty well matchless, be it Cecilia Gasdia as the improvising poetess Corinna or Katia Ricciarelli, no less, as the innkeeper Madama Cortese.

Wildbad's Laura Giordano is perhaps too much the soubrette to be the perfect Corinna and is not ideally balanced in her first aria, which is directed to be overheard 'from within'. Wildbad, however, plays a fuller text. Too full, you might think, in Corinna's great concluding improvisation



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where we get all five stanzas at 11 minutes rather than the three at six minutes which Pesaro provides. But Giordano does well here, recorded separately, I suspect. The Wildbad performance also includes a short chorus within the work's grand finale that has been authenticated since the publication of the 1983 critical edition.

The South-West German Radio recording treats the performance 'as found'. It's good but inevitably it's a bit more rough-and-ready than the 1984 Deutsche Grammophon version, which brings studio polish to what was also a live event.

On the Pesaro set Abbado and the Chamber Orchestra of Europe deliver one of the most vital and refined of all Rossini performances on record. It will probably not be surpassed, but Wildbad's Antonino Fogliani leads a staging that doesn't hang fire for a moment. The piano-accompanied recitatives are vividly delivered; and though the pressures of live performance cause the occasional over-emphasis or loss of pitch, the performance has a vividness and theatrical 'carry' that confirm that *Il viaggio* is indeed 'a feast'.

Richard Osborne

Selected comparison:

Abbado (1/86th) (DG) 477 7435 GGP2 or 479 0125 GB9

Wagner



Der Ring des Nibelungen

| | | |
|--|----------|-------------------------------|
| Tomasz Konieczny | bass-bar | Wotan/Wanderer |
| Iris Vermillion | mez | Fricka |
| Christian Elsner | ten | Loge/Mime ^s |
| Andreas Conrad | ten | Mime ^{DR} |
| Jochen Schmeckenbecher | bar | Alberich |
| Ricarda Merbeth | sop | Freia |
| Maria Radner | contr | Erda ^{DR} |
| Günther Groissböck | bass | Fasolt |
| Timo Riihonen | bass | Fafner ^{DR} /Hunding |
| Robert Dean Smith | ten | Siegmund |
| Melanie Diener | sop | Sieglinde |
| Petra Lang | mez | Brünnhilde ^{DW/G} |
| Anja Fidelia Ulrich | sop | Gerhilde |
| Stephen Gould | ten | Siegfried ^s |
| Violeta Urmana | sop | Brünnhilde ^s |
| Anna Larsson | contr | Erda ^s |
| Matti Salminen | bass | Fafner ^s /Hagen |
| Sophie Klüssmann | sop | Woodbird |
| Lance Ryan | ten | Siegfried ^G |
| Markus Bruck | bar | Gunther |
| Edith Haller | sop | Guntrune |
| Marina Prudenskaja | mez | Waltraute ^G |
| Susanne Resmark, Christa Mayer | mezs | |
| Jacquelyn Wagner | sop | Three Norns |
| Berlin Radio Chorus and Symphony Orchestra / | | |
| Marek Janowski | | |

Pentatone F 13 PTC5186 581
(13h 49' • DDD/DSD • S/T/D)

From PTC5186 406/9 (aas: DR9/13, DW5/12/13, G4/14)
Recorded live at the Philharmonie, Berlin,
November DR22 & DW24, 2012; March S1 & G15, 2013



Following his 1980-83 studio cycle with the Dresden Staatskapelle (Eurodisc, currently on Sony), Marek Janowski's Pentatone set with the Rundfunk-Sinfonieorchester Berlin is his second recording of *The Ring*. It's reissued now in a single chunky box with a super-LP-size but poorly translated bilingual booklet. This 2012/13 series of one-off live concerts at the Berlin Philharmonie (major rehearsals were also sourced) are claimed as the first multichannel surround recording of *The Ring* – although earlier cycles under Asher Fisch (Melba, Adelaide), Hartmut Haenchen (Opus Arte, Amsterdam) and Zubin Mehta (Unitel, Valencia) have also appeared in multichannel sound.

Heard purely in stereo, the sound and balance on these discs are transparently clear in their evenness. The engineering and Janowski always make sure that we hear the voices (naturally, not exaggeratedly over-forward) with plenty of room around them, while the instruments still speak clearly. Try the 'French' wind and string filigrees around the swimming Rhinedaughters or – in a more heavily scored sequence – the Wanderer/Erda duet from *Siegfried*.

Despite a gap between recorded performances of no less than 30 years, the two Janowski *Rings* have much in common from the conductor's point of view. He continues to present a swift traversal of each opera, relatively free of handed-down Germanic performing traditions yet sharing something with the lighter-textured readings, also live, of Clemens Krauss (Pristine, Bayreuth 1953) and Wolfgang Sawallisch (EMI – nla, Munich 1989) – the lyrical, unweighty 'Italian' approach so loved by Wieland Wagner. Janowski's first *Ring* looked backwards musically to the early German Romantics (Weber, Mendelssohn etc) rather than forwards. That is still true – try the first Gibich scene, not at all the heavy, gloomy experience traditionally made of it, where Matti Salminen's seemingly ageless Hagen even takes on some aspects of a comic bass role in his ensnaring of Gunther and Gutrun. However, light and swift he may be, but Janowski still creates a modern-instrument romantic sound picture; he never leans towards the period-conscious approach adapted by Simon Rattle in *Das Rheingold* (BR-Klassik, 10/15) or Hartmut Haenchen in his filmed Amsterdam *Ring* (Opus Arte, 7/06, 10/06).

Whatever his views on modern stage production, Janowski has not left his dramatic brains behind. He deserves credit

for casting for vocal colour, individuality and rightness rather than playing safe – as rather a lot of record company-led Wagner does – through sheer weight of tone or security in tessitura. In the Dresden cycle his distinguishing choices included a serious Loge and Mime, a clearly acted-out and interpreted Siegfried and a youthful Brünnhilde. He opted for a 'classical' Lieder singer (Peter Schreier) as Loge and Mime, an artist with a background in operetta rather than music drama (René Kollo) as Siegfried and a Brünnhilde new to the role (Jeannine Altmeyer). These ideas were continued in 2012/13 with a prominent concert singer, Christian Elsner, as Loge and Mime, and a sharing of the Siegfrieds and Brünnhildes, the better to reflect character. For young Siegfried Stephen Gould, after two recordings with Christian Thielemann, was encouraged to rethink his texts for colour and even fun. The Brünnhildes are imaginatively divided between the torn, more human psychological character in *Walküre* and *Götterdämmerung* (Petra Lang) and *Siegfried*'s more remote goddess (Violeta Urmana).

Janowski's second *Ring* boasts the clear thinking in vocal matters, organised discipline and rehearsed detail from before, now captured in actual performance. This gets some of the best of both worlds – potential concert accuracy and good contact plus the adrenalin of a live occasion. It's only if you compare recent work heard in the theatre under Christian Thielemann (DG, Vienna State Opera) or Daniel Barenboim (ArtHaus Musik, La Scala) that, whatever the relative merits of the casts, there seems to be a greater, more natural musical involvement where actual stage work as part of the rehearsal process has informed the performers' choices.

In terms of atmosphere, Janowski's reading still lacks the dark heroics of evil grandeur that blaze through these scores whenever the 'baddies' Hagen or Alberich think they're winning – or even (earlier in the cycle) when Wotan thinks his plan of getting back the ring via his children is working. This is not a colour in Janowski's palette, although it is in other lyric interpreters' such as Clemens Krauss (Pristine, Bayreuth 1953) or Kempe (try his final *Ring*, Opera Depot, Stockholm 1975), Barenboim (Warner, Bayreuth 1991/92 or 2013's special Proms broadcasts) and Goodall (Chandos, English National Opera 1974/78). These less good-sounding rival *Rings* from the opera house constitute a more rounded listening experience, for all Janowski's undoubtedly success in casting and performing the *Ring* a second time.

Mike Ashman

REPLAY

Rob Cowan's monthly survey of historic reissues and archive recordings

Klemperer in Philadelphia, Mengelberg in New York

Two great European conductors cross the pond to wonderful effect

Few great conductors of the past 70 years have enjoyed a healthier posthumous re-evaluation through first-release concert performances than **Otto Klemperer**. Most tapes have hailed from Europe but Pristine Audio brings us a batch of recordings (also out on Archiphon) featuring stereo recordings of concerts that Klemperer gave in the early 1960s with the Philadelphia Orchestra, Pristine offering a slightly 'aired' alternative to the drier but admirably clear version of the tapes favoured by Archiphon. The difference between these generally well recorded offerings and their European counterparts is down to the combination of Klemperer's gruffly marmoreal conducting style and the refined, not to mention brilliant, quality of the Philadelphians' playing.

This was Eugene Ormandy's well-oiled machine at the very height of its powers, sonorous, soloistic in all departments, weighty through muscle rather than through flab, and responsive to Klemperer's every gesture, always patient and, for most of the time, just plain beautiful, especially the winds and strings. All this makes Klemperer's refusal to compromise eminently palatable, though without lessening the impact of his generally big-boned interpretations. Add a lyrical, linear quality and a propensity for sudden *crescendos* and you have a series of recordings that soon embosses itself on the memory. Also, still with Schumann's Symphony No 4 (and not No 3 as it says on the cover artwork), Klemperer has his strings play so quietly (40 seconds or so later), while letting his winds sing out. It's all so much more natural than its London counterpart, as if Klemperer were keeping control while dropping the formality.

Beethoven's *Pastoral* Symphony provides a quite different contrast. The 'Peasant's

Merrymaking' is still played slow-motion ('You're not sure? You'll get used to it' to paraphrase Klemperer himself) but compared with the stereo Philharmonia recording the very opening sports a luxuriance that is quite unlike any other Klemperer performance on disc. The proto-minimalist development chugs along contentedly, building as it goes and only the storm disappoints by dint of some rather constricted dynamics. Bach's First *Brandenburg* ambles breezily with an easy gait (certainly in comparison with the urgency of current period-performance practitioners) and Brahms's Third combines warmth with an impressive depth of tone, the opening grounded on a firm bass line, the middle movements nicely differentiated. The *Eroica*'s high spot is the first movement, Klemperer considerably allowing his winds to shine, the disruptive centre and the exultant coda superbly built, while the *Marcia funèbre* has gravitas to spare, but without sounding excessively weighted. Granted, maybe Beethoven's Seventh hasn't quite the wry humour that is such a key ingredient in the 1955 Philharmonia version (especially just before the first movement's coda) but the finale builds up a fair head of steam. Mozart's *Jupiter*, on the other hand, is exceptional, the first movement (with repeat) rising high on a sense of momentum, the *Andante cantabile* extremely expressive and the finale, both unusually swift and cumulatively exultant. All four CDs provide worthwhile additions to Klemperer's already impressive discography.

A brief check of Klemperer's Philadelphia timing for the first movement of the *Eroica* against **Willem Mengelberg**'s 1930 New York recording for Victor (16'46" as opposed to 17'25") suggests extra breadth of Mengelberg's part, but not so. As far as I

know Mengelberg was the first conductor on disc to play the long first-movement exposition repeat and for many years he was also the last. Opus Kura's new transfer is admirably honest, to the extent of reporting the original's strong bass response and an overall sense of acoustical tightness. The performance is rather more Classical in concept than the conductor's later Beethoven, though there are some subtle shifts in tempo in the first movement and notable instances of *portamento* in the *Marcia funèbre*, especially towards the movement's close. Less memorable than the best of Mengelberg's symphony recordings from the Concertgebouw (Beethoven, Tchaikovsky, Brahms and Dvořák) its leanness and directness are appealing. The same CD also includes a lissom *Magic Flute* Overture, a powerful *Egmont* Overture and a proudly strutting Coronation March from Meyerbeer's *Le prophète*, perhaps the best performance on disc prior to van Otterloo in The Hague and Paray in Detroit. Altogether a fair sampling of Mengelberg's work in New York, with only *Ein Heldenleben* as more impressive still. **G**

THE RECORDINGS



Klemperer in Philadelphia, Vol 1

Bach. Brahms. Beethoven
Symphony No 3

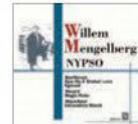
Pristine Audio ② ⑤ PASC465



Klemperer in Philadelphia, Vol 2

Beethoven Symphonies
Nos 6 & 7. Mozart. Schumann

Pristine Audio ② ⑤ PASC467



Beethoven. Mozart. Meyerbeer Mengelberg

Opus Kura ⑤ OPK2115



Igor Oistrakh's Elgar Violin Concerto hints at what his father might have sounded like in the work

Oistrakh's Elgar

Rumour has it that as part of a violin concerto marathon in Soviet Russia in the late 1940s David Oistrakh performed the Elgar Concerto. Would that we could find a recording – this great interpreter of the Brahms would surely have been wondrously effective in the Elgar – but as far as I know none exists. In the meantime we have David's adoring son Igor, who has just turned 85. It is some small consolation that elements of his father's style inform this excellent performance. Igor's 1984 recording of Elgar's Concerto once appeared on Olympia and I'm grateful to have it available again, the tone born of an easily recognisable lineage, warm, full-blooded, with slides and shifts that are indeed reminiscent of David. Try the very first entry or the glorious second subject (6'10") and you could as well be panning back to the late 1940s, with that assured technique, secure attack, beautifully modulated tone and a brand of virtuosity that serves the music rather than exploits it. Valentin Zhuk's conducting takes the Romantic route, sensitive rather than especially idiomatic (though the beginning of the *Largo* is memorable) and the accompanied cadenza in the finale is filled with a sense of nostalgia. I'd hate to give the impression that Igor is cloning his father, far from it, just that time and again I imagine father and son discussing the work, and Igor taking David's guidance on board. Haydn's Concerto for Violin, Piano and Strings in F, Hob.XVIII:6 is a charming example of his early maturity, the finale especially. Oistrakh and pianist Natalia Zertsalova give an excellent performance, again under Zhuk. Generally good sound.

PHOTOGRAPHY: SPUTNIK/ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

THE RECORDING



Elgar. Haydn
I Oistrakh; Zertsalova; Zhuk
Melodiya M CD10 02384

Schoenberg and van Kempen conduct Mahler

Pristine Audio has just released the only known example of Arnold Schoenberg conducting music other than his own, the second movement of Mahler's Second Symphony – a 1934 concert performance with the Cadillac Symphony Orchestra that vies with Walter's or Mengelberg's Mahler for flexibility and affection. Even within the first minute and a half the music is broadening markedly (speeds vary to great expressive effect throughout the performance), and with sundry *portamentos*, delicate pointing from the strings, a wide roster of dynamics and a palpable sense of anticipation on virtually every page you're treated to some of the most expressive Mahler interpretation ever to have been captured on disc. I should, I suppose, add that your imagination will need to filter what is basically pretty ropey sound (with grating surface noise to match) though Andrew Rose has done his level best with the source material. Also there is a small chunk of music missing though I was grateful Rose didn't attempt to fill it with the relevant passage from another recording. What's for sure is that no other Mahler performance on disc is even vaguely like this one. The coupling, rather better recorded, is from 1950 and features the Hilversum Radio Philharmonic Orchestra

under Paul van Kempen in a complete performance of Mahler's Fourth. Producer Mark Obert-Thorn points out that van Kempen played in the violin section of the Concertgebouw and draws parallels with his and Mengelberg's approach to the Symphony's opening, though the latter's *rallentando* is infinitely more marked than is van Kempen's. Also the younger conductor's account of the slow movement is less flexible and prone to flights of romantic fancy than Mengelberg's, though as a whole his performance is a good one and a worthy addition to the ever-growing Mahler discography. The adequate soprano soloist in the finale is Corry Bijster.

THE RECORDING



Mahler
Schoenberg; van Kempen
Pristine Audio M PASC466

Kletzki in Lucerne

An interesting Paul Kletzki release from Audité reproduces a 1946 concert performance of an interpretation that may be familiar to some readers as a set of five Columbia 78s, namely Brahms Fourth Symphony played by the Swiss Festival Orchestra (or Lucerne Festival Orchestra as we commonly know it nowadays). The actual recording sessions lasted until September 7, which was also the day of an additional concert – given in aid of charity – which is what is reproduced here. Kletzki's performance is refreshingly bright-textured, with careful though never cautious handling of the first movement's many dialogic episodes, a warm-hearted *Andante moderato*, a bracing *scherzo* and a finale that although indulgently appreciative of the flute solo keeps a firm grip on the passacaglia structure. I loved it, though the transfer engineers have been a little over-zealous in their efforts to reduce surface noise. The same concert included Schubert's *Unfinished*, played without its first-movement repeat but very sensitively interpreted, and a dramatic account of Beethoven's Overture *Leonore* No 3. I've not heard many Kletzki performances that leave as strong an impression as the Brahms. There is no applause. **G**

THE RECORDING



Brahms. Schubert. Beethoven
Kletzki
Audité M 95.642

Books



Kate Molleson on a portrait of eight female composers:
'Her prose is fuelled by a passionate sense of injustice and fury, and a brilliantly un-pompous scholarly clout'



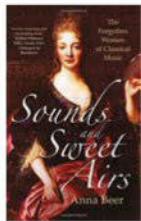
Geoffrey Norris reads a concise new Tchaikovsky biography:
'Philip Ross Bullock distils a great deal of thought and breadth of knowledge into this slim volume'

Sounds and Sweet Airs: The Forgotten Women of Classical Music

By Anna Beer

Oneworld Publications, HB, 384 pp, £16.99

ISBN 978-1-78-074856-6



'How to be a great composer?' asks Anna Beer at the end of *Sounds and Sweet Airs*. 'There is, of course, a simple answer: be born a man.' The remark might sound flippant were it not preceded by 350 pages of rigorous narrative about eight women whose composing careers were determined not by their inherent greatness but by their gender.

Beer is a cultural historian who has previously written on John Milton and Bess, wife of Sir Walter Raleigh. Now her study of Francesca Caccini, Barbara Strozzi, Elisabeth Jacquet de la Guerre, Marianne Martínez, Fanny Hensel, Clara Schumann, Lili Boulanger and Elizabeth Maconchy is a lively articulation of the socio-historical context in which these women composed. This is a book about the politics of music more than a book about music: it contains hardly any analysis of key structures or tempi, and is none the worse for that.

'Forget that I am a woman and let's talk about the music!' came the cry from Nadia Boulanger, and Maconchy voiced similar sentiments, longing to be known not as a woman composer but a plain composer. Beer can't quite accept these pleas. Maconchy arrived at the Royal College of Music in 1923, a shy Irish girl who took the place by storm. 'The rest should be history,' Beer writes. 'That it is not is one of the driving forces behind this book.'

Her prose is fuelled by a passionate sense of injustice and fury, and a brilliantly un-pompous scholarly clout. She's opinionated and lets it show. She's a vivid and compassionate storyteller, letting us imagine these women's intrigues and dilemmas and sacrifices and frustrations.

She notes fashions of the day: how women in Martínez's era were stuck in enormous hooped petticoats that made them move like puppets with their feet sticking out.

Several biographies already exist for most (not all) of the composers featured in this book, so Beer's purpose in placing their stories side-by-side is to tease out commonalities between women living in different cultures, in different eras, and with different degrees of privilege. Some (Strozzi, Maconchy) were fiercely ambitious to defy their social limitations, others less so: Clara Schumann believed that women 'always betrayed themselves in their compositions'. Gender is the shared experience here, so what can we learn? Beer's conclusion is that a female composer must be exceptional. Exceptionally talented, exceptionally driven, exceptionally lucky.

She cries foul on enduring stereotypes, palpably irritated by the image of *la petite* Lili Boulanger as dreamy and fragile, rightly bristling at lazy descriptors of 'masculine' and 'feminine' music still bandied about today. (I hope the florid typeface on the book's cover is ironic.) Issues around bodies and sexuality are never far from the surface: 'Every female musician operated in the shadow of this image of the lascivious whore, who used music as a form of entrapment, destroying "rational man".'

So how did these eight women break through? Beer repeatedly stresses that they shouldn't be considered supernatural exceptions: that countless other talented women would fill today's concert programmes if they'd been allowed access to predominantly male musical infrastructures. Again and again she returns to lucky anomalies. Caccini's father educated the young Francesca 'as if she did not belong to the artisan class into which he and she had been born'. Strozzi lived in Venice in an era of radical libertines and intellectuals, but she was also a prostitute, painted with one of her breasts exposed, which meant she had less to lose than, say, the impeccable Martínez, who never dared to write a symphony or an opera because 'it would not have been proper'.

Questions around prejudice apply to many male composers, too, and occasionally I wondered whether Beer's arguments circled too narrowly around gender. Why didn't Maconchy achieve a place in the public's heart equivalent to Britten or Walton? Possibly because she was a woman, or possibly because she was Irish and her music was tough. Or take the loss of manuscripts: 'And so, once again, a female composer's work fades into oblivion. Once again, a female composer's work is allowed to slip out of the classical canon because, after all, she only won the women's race.' There are umpteen male composers whose works have been lost, misfiled, forgotten.

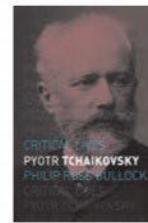
So, yes, equivalent books could be written about composers denied a place in the classical canon because of ethnicity or class or religion, but that doesn't negate the truth and importance of *Sounds and Sweet Airs*. With her straight-talking, confident prose, maybe Beer is the person to now write those other books. **Kate Molleson**

Pyotr Tchaikovsky

By Philip Ross Bullock

Reaktion Books, PB, 224pp, £11.99

ISBN 978-1-78-023654-4



The temptation with any new book on Tchaikovsky these days is to turn to the back and see how it ends.

The kerfuffle over his death has tended to exert at least as much fascination as the circumstances of his life. Did he drink unboiled water? Did he do so by accident and thus contract the fatal cholera, or was he driven to it by a court of honour of his peers solemnly passing sentence on account of a homosexual affair with a member of the Russian imperial family? Had the members of Tchaikovsky's social circle begun to fear that his dalliances might be a threat to their own way of life? Short of discovering irrefutable documentary



The Tchaikovsky brothers: Pyotr (second from right) with Anatoly, Nikolay, Ippolit and Modest, St Petersburg, 1890

evidence, we can never be sure. Tchaikovsky, so far as we know, remained mute on these last points.

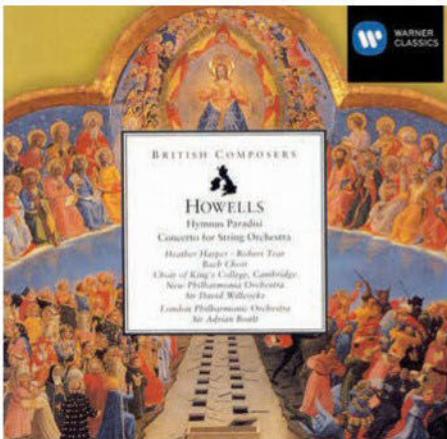
Philip Ross Bullock's verdict is as sane, measured and well-reasoned as the rest of this 'critical life' of Tchaikovsky. He brings context to his arguments and creates a convincing perspective. Tchaikovsky might on occasion have rued the fact that his 'buggermania' (as he called it) isolated and alienated him and made him shy and mistrustful of others, but he was by no means alone in his sexual preferences. There was his brother, Modest, for a start, together with a whole milieu of like-thinking men in Russian cultural society, not to mention others within the royal family and the nobility. Is not Prince Felix Yusupov alleged to have had a fling with Rasputin? The consequence, from Professor Bullock's point of view, is that Tchaikovsky managed to conduct his personal life as he wished and with a degree of discretion, for all that he was quite candid about his infatuations, conquests and emotional and physical pleasures in letters to his brothers Modest and Anatoly. Any misgivings he might have had were centred not so much on his sexual proclivity itself but on how any public revelation of it might affect his reputation as a figure of national standing and of international importance.

How does this square, then, with the sketchy 'programme' that Tchaikovsky envisaged for the opening movement of the Fifth Symphony, the one in which he spoke of 'murmurs, doubts, laments, reproaches against xxx', 'xxx' being generally interpreted as a reference to his homosexuality? Bullock, somewhat oddly, does not offer an opinion on the significance of 'xxx'. For sure, by page 143 of his fascinating book, we have got the gist of how Tchaikovsky felt about himself so maybe do not need a further reminder, and Bullock prefers, convincingly, to dwell on the 'spiritual narrative' implicit in Tchaikovsky's words, coinciding with a 'rebirth of his religious feelings' that he was experiencing at about the same time. The picture that emerges is not that of a composer whose music sprang from torture and guilt about his homosexuality. Moreover, as Bullock comments at the end of his book, 'If we argue that Tchaikovsky's music speaks, then we may wish to concentrate less on interpreting what we think it might say and more on the means by which it achieves such a striking sense of expressiveness.'

The death, then, can be explained simply by the prevalence of cholera in boggy St Petersburg, much though that tugs against all the romantic myths and embroidered 'first-hand accounts' that

Bullock also discusses. The *Pathétique* Symphony is not simply the ready-made Requiem and deathbed confession that it is often held up to be. Indeed, Bullock points to its far-reaching musical impact on Mahler, Sibelius, Elgar and Shostakovich. It is this type of thought-provoking comment that makes this book so interesting. Bullock's terms of reference are wide enough to be able to draw in comparisons and contrasts with other composers rather than viewing Tchaikovsky in isolation. He does not let the book's pace falter by pausing abruptly to consider particular works but rather weaves works and life into a seamless narrative, at the same time using his space wisely to make pertinent observations about the music's character, construction and implications within Tchaikovsky's oeuvre and the 19th century in general. On a much larger scale, we already have in English the four-volume Tchaikovsky study by David Brown (1978-91), Alexander Poznansky's psychological and social analysis (1993) and Alexandra Orlova's documentary 'self-portrait' (1990), in which the court-of-honour theory about the death first hit the headlines. But Bullock distils a great deal of thought and breadth of knowledge into this slim volume, conjuring up a clear picture of its subject and written in a way that is both stimulating and illuminating. **Geoffrey Norris**

Classics RECONSIDERED



Howells

Hymnus Paradisi

Heather Harper sop **Robert Tear** ten

Bach Choir; Choir of King's College, Cambridge;

New Philharmonia Orchestra / David Willcocks

Warner Classics Ⓜ 095405-2

From HMV ASD2600

Over 15 years ago *The Record Guide* was referring to the *Hymnus Paradisi* as 'a most moving and individual piece, of which a recording would be welcome'. Here at last, thanks to the Vaughan Williams Trust, is the answer; and most eloquently performed the work is, with Heather Harper and Robert Tear as the excellent soloists under David Willcocks, who probably has, as an organist who has recorded some of Howells's music and a choirmaster who has often conducted it,



David Threasher
and **Geraint Lewis**
reassess the 1970
David Willcocks
recording of Howells's
Hymnus Paradisi



a closer feeling for the composer than most musicians.

The unhappy genesis of the *Hymnus* has been described by the composer himself... Undoubtedly it struck from him music of a new potency and depth; but time was required before the response to loss could be framed in a work of art. This is, of course, a characteristic of the creative mind, puzzling though it sometimes seems to the outsider, who cannot understand how an artist's circumstances so often belie the work he is producing at that moment. Howells has always been an exceptionally scrupulous craftsman, and it is not hard to see that he would need time to fashion a work that was not a cry of pain but an act of requiem. The six sections are, in the event, skilfully chosen.

Howells grew up in the organ loft, and (as this recording admirably shows) his music sounds superb in cathedral acoustics. He has a fine ear for sound and a practical skill in writing for chorus with orchestra; and he is far from indecisive in constructing music on an extended scale that does not belong to any formal matrix. With a tradition that was still natural, Howells would be a more significant composer: he has suffered from living through explosive times and finding it difficult to impose order upon them. His solution has been a quietist one... But I suspect that there may be a larger audience for the work on records, especially given this affectionate performance, than at first meets the eye.

John Warrack (3/7)

Geraint Lewis It seems astonishing now that *Hymnus Paradisi* – a long-acknowledged masterpiece of the English choral tradition – should have been forced to wait more than 60 years from the premiere in Gloucester Cathedral at the 1950 Three Choirs Festival until its first BBC Proms performance in 2012! And, in seeming defiance of that tribe which still sniffs at such outmoded outposts of late-English Romanticism, it was ecstatically received and reviewed as a great work in its own right and on its own terms. Why then the long wait?

David Threasher I was at the Proms performance four years ago and, thinking back to that concert, the *Hymnus Paradisi* in the first half of the programme remains more firmly lodged in the memory than the Elgar First in the second half. I wonder whether a certain typically British tendency to be either self-effacing (at best) or embarrassed (at worst) about

our native musical heritage lies behind a palpable reluctance to revel even in masterpieces such as this. And listening again to Willcocks's recording, one is reminded to some extent of Holst and Vaughan Williams, but at the same time a very individual voice, in its piquant modality and unique harmonic imagination, is revealed.

GL Yes indeed – it's interesting that John Warrack's response in 1971 concentrates on the piece itself but says virtually nothing about the performance. Tellingly, his comments on the music now seem to me both dated and limited but his description of the performance as 'affectionate' does rather hit the nail on the head. It was obviously a hugely needed document in its day – given that 20 years had passed since the premiere – and in that sense it filled an important gap in the catalogue.

DT And it fortuitously found a sympathetic recording team, headed by Howells's erstwhile student Ronald Kinloch Anderson as producer, and a generous acoustic in the old Kingsway Hall in Holborn. There's a glorious glow to the New Philharmonia's strings that's so characteristic of analogue recordings of that era, and the woodwind solos are beautifully taken. But to me it seems happy to wallow a little – much in the 'English cowpat' manner – rather than opt for a more incisive performance style.

GL Everything about it is warm, safe, comfortable but totally without 'edge'; to me the most treasurable aspects today are the instantly recognisable voices of Heather Harper and Robert Tear plus the bloom of the King's College boys in their Golden Era: especially moving when you consider – as is known now, but wasn't in 1970 – that the origin of the music lay way back in 1932 as an unaccompanied Requiem Howells



David Willcocks brings a choral trainer's ear to Herbert Howells's choral masterpiece

meant to send to Boris Ord at King's but which ended up (as so often) in his bottom drawer, and which was then used as the basis for *Hymnus Paradisi* in 1938 but not released until 1980. And even more poignant is to note that the core of the music itself thus pre-dates the tragic death of Howells's nine-year-old son Michael on holiday in Gloucestershire – and the direct stimulus for *Hymnus* – by three years. As a premonition of death it causes a shudder akin to Mahler's dangerous prescience in *Kindertotenlieder*.

DT Yet this is a performance that seems to want to console rather than confront. The danger is there in the emotion behind the work but it seems to be an aspect that these performers wish to sidestep to some extent. It's a valid approach to take; but there's surely more to be found in this music?

GL For me, the basic problem with the performance lies in the conducting by

David Willcocks of the main chorus and orchestra. The Bach Choir members back then sound to have been a pale shadow of their present selves...

DT Well, having heard the current generation recently in a diversity of repertoire, they're everything a large amateur choir should be these days! From the class of 1970 you do hear a degree of sibilance and some consonants that are far from unanimous, which are audible especially on headphones, but that's more than made up for in David Hill's Naxos recording. The Bach Choir seem to be lucky to have been able to engage the leading choral trainers of the time, and they're going from strength to strength under Hill these days.

GL Well yes and, following their revelatory recent disc of Howells's *Stabat mater*, what would be wonderful now is a second

recording of his epic *Missa Sabrinensis* under David Hill. Let's hope the Bach Choir can complete the trilogy before too long in resplendent recorded sound, too, like their *Hymnus Paradisi*...

DT ...and modern digital sound matches their accuracy, giving Hill's recording that touch greater incisiveness and point that I miss in the Willcocks.

GL Willcocks was a great choral trainer and came directly from the Three Choirs tradition (Worcester in his case), which has its good points but also its less good. You can sense, in the more strenuous sections of *Hymnus*, his going from bar to bar with the choir, letting the orchestra follow and basically hoping for the best. It's an enormous shame, in my view, that he wasn't persuaded here – as also in his Vaughan Williams discs of the time – to prepare the choral performance but then hand over to Sir Adrian Boult, himself a former Bach Choir conductor, EMI artist and one of those (along with RVW, Finzi and Sumsion) who persuaded Howells to let *Hymnus Paradisi* out of its enforced hibernation since 1938. Ironically, the coupling on my recorded version of *Hymnus Paradisi* is Boult's passionate 1974 Howells Concerto for Strings, which gives us a tantalising glimpse of 'what might have been'...

DT My *Hymnus Paradisi* is the 1990 pressing, which couples it with the Wilfred Brown recording of Finzi's *Dies Natalis* – another utterly cherishable score which, in this case, does find pretty much its ideal recording. But back to Willcocks and Howells: what do you think of the competition?

GL Of recorded rivals, Vernon Handley (Hyperion, 5/92) is architectural but a bit clinical, while Richard Hickox (Chandos, A/99) is radiant, emotional and erotically fired in a way quite distinct from anyone else – and is the only one to get the final climax and its afterglow *absolutely* right! David Hill (Naxos, 8/07) then combines these opposing qualities in a sound picture that reveals more textures, colours and a wider dynamic range than any other. But even if all of these surpass Willcocks in 1970, his version still has the unique solo voices of Harper and Tear and is the only one to feature boys as the semi-chorus, so will remain a treasurable historic document for these reasons alone – even as the work itself lives on to reveal more and more of its myriad secrets with every new traversal. **G**

THE SPECIALIST'S GUIDE TO...

Racine in music

The work of France's greatest tragic dramatist inspired composers as varied as Handel, Mendelssohn and Britten. **Tim Ashley** explores the powerful musical responses to Racine's stage works across three centuries

Jean Racine is in some respects among European literature's most paradoxical figures. His output for the stage, 12 plays in all, is small when placed both beside the work of his contemporaries Corneille and Molière and within the context of his own oeuvre, which contains much sacred verse and a great deal of prose, mostly produced when he was historiographer to Louis XIV, a position he held for the last 22 years of his life. His major period as a playwright – from 1664 to 1677, when he withdrew from the public theatre after *Phèdre* – can be interpreted biographically as an interlude in the career of an opportunistic bourgeois determined to make it at court: his last stage works, the sacred dramas *Esther* (1689) and *Athalie* (1691), were commissioned by Madame de Maintenon for private performance at Saint-Cyr, a girls' college of which she was patron.

Racine was educated by Jansenists – members of a reformist Catholic sect that maintained ideas of a predestined elect and the withholding or dispensing of grace on the part of an unknowable God. Their severe theology underpinned his work: the protagonists believe themselves to be the prey of inscrutable deities, and fight against desires, sexual or otherwise, which they are ultimately powerless to control. The emotional extremism of his writing is contained by a fierce adherence to classical structure and a breathtaking perfection of Alexandrine verse.

Musicians were drawn to him in his lifetime and have been inspired by him well into the 20th century. Lully modelled the recitatives in his *tragédies lyriques* on the stylised declamation adopted by Racine's leading actresses. Racine's own inclusion of



Racine's dozen stage works form the cornerstone of French tragic drama and have inspired many composers

sung choruses based on the Psalms in his sacred dramas strongly influenced Handel and decisively shaped the form of English oratorio. That Rameau and Gluck decided

to base groundbreaking scores on his secular tragedies was to have a major impact on operatic history in France and beyond. **G**



Mendelssohn

Athalia

Sols; Chorus Musicus

Köln; Das neue Orchester / Christoph Spering Capriccio

Mendelssohn's incidental music and choruses for an 1845 Berlin production of *Athalie* were posthumously revamped with narration as an oratorio, which was immensely popular in its day. It's a very Protestant interpretation of a Jansenist-Catholic text. The 'March from Athalie' referred to, uncredited, in countless 19th-century novels, is the rabble-rousing 'War March of the Priests'. Spering allows us a rare opportunity to hear the score complete.

Grétry

Andromaque

Sols; Le Concert Spirituel /

Hervé Niquet

Glossa

Grétry's only *tragédie lyrique* is an adaptation of the play that established Racine's supremacy over his rivals at its 1667 premiere. It's a stark piece that frequently quotes from the original text, and strikingly uses different choral groupings for the various confidants. A finer work than the comedies on which Grétry's reputation primarily rests, it gets a lean, authentic-sounding performance here. Karine Deshayes is haunting in the title-role.



Gluck

Iphigénie en Aulide

Sols; Opéra de Lyon /

John Eliot Gardiner

Warner Classics

Gluck's first work for Paris takes *Iphigénie* (1674) as its source, though it also refers back to Euripides' *Iphigenia in Aulis* on which Racine drew. Its clarity of expression and emotional directness resulted in a drastic re-appraisal of French operatic methodology and, in the figure of Agamemnon, Gluck created one of his most psychologically complex characters. Gardiner gives us Gluck's revised score, prepared a year after the premiere (rather than Wagner's often-heard edition).



Handel

Esther

Sols; London Handel Orch and

Choir / Laurence Cummings Somm

Written in 1718 and originally performed staged, *Esther* was Handel's first English oratorio, though his attempts to produce a 1732 revision in London met with the ecclesiastical prohibition against the theatrical representation of Biblical subjects. Both versions betray evidence of hasty composition, though the Racinian interweaving of sacred narrative with Psalm-based choruses was to prove a model that Handel would perfect. Cummings is a persuasive advocate for the 1732 score.



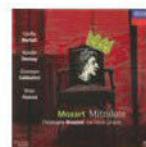
Rameau

Hippolyte et Aricie

Sols; OAE / William Christie

Opus Arte (DVD)

It could be argued that the loose-limbed structure of *Hippolyte et Aricie* strays too widely from *Phèdre*, though its major excursions are drawn from the mythological variants Racine himself discusses in the play's preface. Its controlled extravagance makes it one of the great French Baroque entertainments, though Rameau's insights into *Phèdre*'s emotional and moral torment form a real heart of darkness. Christie conducted a superb Glyndebourne cast in 2013.



Mozart

Mitridate, re di Ponto

Soloists; Les Talens Lyriques /

Christophe Rousset Decca

The 18th-century fashion for the operatic *lieto fine* frequently softened the denouements of Racine's tragedies, and the 14-year-old Mozart's adaptation of *Mithridate*, about the brothers Pharnace and Xipharès - enemies in war yet both in love with their father's intended bride - acquired an extra character, Ismene, in order to effect a reconciliatory ending. Mozart turns Racine's tirades into arias of staggering difficulty. It's a real tour de force if it's properly sung ... as here.



Fauré

Cantique de Jean Racine

Choeur et Orchestre de Paris /

Paavo Järvi

Erato

Fauré turned to the 1688 *Hymnes traduites du Bréviaire Romain* for the text of his *Cantique*. The Matins hymn 'Verbe égal au Très-Haut', imagines human voices breaking their night-time silence in praise of Christ as the Word of God made flesh, reflected in Fauré's exquisite choral writing. Aged 19, he found his own voice with it. It remains, quite simply, one of the most beautiful things ever written, its fervour and grace superbly captured on this recording.



Handel

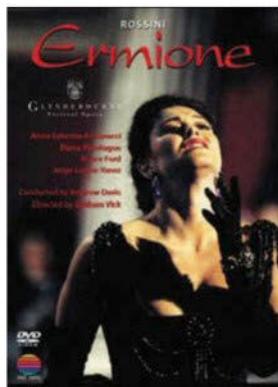
Athalia

Sols; Choir of New College

Oxford; AAM / Christopher

Hogwood Decca

Racine's last anti-heroine, guilty yet existentially defiant, finds her power undermined by the certainties of the religion she has set out to destroy: Handel imagines her as an operatic diva increasingly adrift in a musical landscape in which the focus gradually shifts to the collective power of the chorus. Joan Sutherland gives one of her most striking performances on Christopher Hogwood's recording. The choral singing is tremendous.



Rossini

Ermione Soloists; London Philharmonic Orchestra / Andrew Davis Warner/NVC Arts (DVD)

Rossini's 1819 version of *Andromaque* has claims to being the most powerful of all works based on Racine. Charting a nerve-wracking descent into psychological hell, it equates naked emotion with extreme vocal rhetoric as the private desires of its central quartet of characters swamp their political and dynastic concerns in the aftermath of the Trojan war. The opera exerts a terrifying grip from start to finish. CD

versions by David Parry (Opera Rara) and Claudio Scimone (Erato) more than meet its challenges. But to get the full impact, you need to watch Graham Vick's astonishing Glyndebourne staging, with Anna-Caterina Antonacci giving the performance of a lifetime as the deranged, murderous heroine. Difficult to find on DVD, but readily available on YouTube, it ideally serves both Rossini and Racine, and is essential viewing.

THE GRAMOPHONE COLLECTION

Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron*

David Patrick Stearns explains the reasons why he is drawn to this unfinished religious and philosophical opera – a wild and brutal work that is impossible to take lightly, resulting in a strong discography

Although still considered a barely approachable modernist peak, Schoenberg's *Moses und Aron* was among my first favourite operas, handily winning over *Tosca* (which I first encountered around the same time), and for highly specific reasons.

To my post-adolescent ears, *Tosca* depended on such a tradition-steeped suspension of disbelief that the opera felt like alien territory. *Moses und Aron*'s abrasive atonality seemed viscerally suited to the primitivism of the Old Testament – and the characterisation of people unmoored from any sense of home. No *Tosca*-esque Sacristan popped in to tell us what normal life was like. There was no normal life in this opera. Most interesting of all, *Moses und Aron* confronted questions that could never be answered, such as the nature of faith, control of the masses and – in a plight familiar to all music critics – the impossibility of describing abstract phenomena in words. Best of all, the opera starts immediately: Moses's revelation commences in the opening seconds, the burning bush effect created by three choruses – one singing, one spoken, one with children – creating a magical multidimensional musical effect that's one of the most eerily entrancing scenes in all of opera. Also, the effect can be hugely different – rhetorical or lyrical – from one performance to the next, depending on which chorus dominates.

The second scene establishes the opera's central dynamic: Moses embodies the profundity of God in *Sprechstimme*, but Aron translates that to the larger public with his tenor voice and charismatic, wide-ranging

vocal lines. The rest of the opera involves the two of them galvanising the Israelites, leading them to freedom and then losing them to the golden calf when Moses is away on Mount Sinai for too long. During the Act 2 orgies (when Moses's followers run amok, tearing off their clothes, eating raw meat and sacrificing their lives for the golden calf), the orchestral writing displays jaw-dropping invention on every level. While *Tosca* was so popular as to be public property, *Moses und Aron* frightened away the timid and welcomed my deeper sense of ownership. *Tosca* belonged to the world. *Moses und Aron* was mine.

INCOMPLETE YET FORMIDABLE

Premiered in 1954, three years after the composer's death, *Moses und Aron* was one of several works in which Schoenberg embraced his Jewish heritage. By 1932 he had composed the music and written the libretto for the first two acts, his version of the story suggesting parallels between Moses's Ten Commandments and his own 12-tone system. But although he had, by 1935, completed the libretto for Act 3 in which Aron drops dead (although personally I find it hard to believe that the composer considered this single scene to be the whole act), Schoenberg never produced any music for it. As late as 1950, he wrote: 'It is not entirely impossible that I should finish the third act within a year.' But no music was forthcoming – and so right at the end of his life Schoenberg suggested that the text be spoken. Many of the opera's champions find an eloquence in the Act 2 conclusion where Moses, bereft over the faithlessness

of the Israelites, despairs over ever being able to express the abstraction of his god into words that the wider public will understand – with strings playing a penetrating F sharp, rising from *piano* to *forte* and back again. Nonetheless, Zoltán Kocsis wrote an Act 3 completion in 2009. But the 1966 Hermann Scherchen recording offers another viable solution: Act 3 is spoken against a reprise of the first act's burning bush music.

Perhaps because the opera is so formidable to perform, nobody takes it on lightly, and thus the discography maintains a surprisingly high level. The opera requires strategy as much as passion – and no doubt benefits from *Wozzeck* (by Schoenberg's student Alban Berg) having pioneered the atonal operatic idiom decades prior to the *Moses und Aron* premiere. Some of the best recordings aren't by the expensive world-class ensembles, such as the Chicago Symphony and Royal Concertgebouw orchestras, but rather by radio orchestras which have the kind of time to spend with the piece that allows them to go beyond the notes and into a true understanding of it. Live recordings of staged productions often go deeper, if only because they're informed by theatrical examination: vocal lines aren't as dramatically intuitive as those in, say, *Erwartung*, and need extra time for singers to make them 'speak'. Studio recordings, at their best, reveal the opera's internal struggles, so much so that one can take the Act 2 insanity as a metaphor for the inner demons that seem to be part of mankind. The DVDs suggest that the opera was made for *Regietheater*. The story's parable all but asks for departures from representational story-telling. The Ruhrtriennale DVD, for example, shows Moses coming down from the mountain dragging an endless white cape on which the Ten Commandments are written.

The opera's maiden outing in Hamburg with the North German Radio Chorus and Orchestra should have been a disaster. Conductor Hans Schmidt-Isserstedt fell ill, but Hans Rosbaud stepped in and must have known the opera well; the performance became the first official recording (at least in the US), spread across three Columbia LPs. But the world was still figuring out what this opera needed. While Hans Herbert Fiedler established a tradition of gruff, Wagnerian bass voices as the thick-tongued Moses, Helmut Krebs is too light a tenor to really convey the power that Aron has over the people, and perhaps hadn't lived with the role enough to use the words in ways that make up for his lack of vocal weight. The Act 2



A scene from the second staged production of *Moses und Aron*, which took place at the Städtische Oper Berlin in 1959. The same forces - Josef Greindl (Moses, pictured right) and Helmut Melchert (Aron) conducted by Hermann Scherchen, recorded the opera live in 1966



'Physical and vocal charisma': Dale Duesing as Moses in Willy Decker's Ruhrtriennale production

confrontation between Moses und Aron can sometimes flag in later recordings, yet Rosbaud captures a particularly nervous tension that unquestionably sustains this scene. Those lucky enough to own the original Columbia Masterworks LP issue also will discover that its booklet contains two revealing essays, one by music theorist Allen Forte on Schoenberg's use of language and another by composer and theorist Milton Babbitt on the opera's use of tone rows. After reading these, one marvels anew that music so systematised sounds so spontaneous and dramatically adept.

A STAPLE - THOUGH NOT A CHOICE

Not for roughly 20 years was there another widely available recording that truly gave the full measure of the opera: **Michael Gielen**'s set on Philips, which contains elements that haven't really been superseded. In Act 1, orchestra and chorus seem a tad tentative and score-bound (the burning bush music features the Vienna

Boys' Choir – can you imagine their bewilderment?), but, from the beginning, the title-roles have particular charisma. Günter Reich is an unusually baritonal Moses while Louis Devos finds great emotional range in Aron's vocal lines, sometimes smoothing over the spiky edges yet revealing the character who pursues his faith as intensively as Moses. Devos projects a self-doubt and anguish that reminds you he's a person, not a prophet. Act 2 kicks in explosively. And although other recordings have even greater strengths than this one, this is in my collection for keeps.

The 20 years between Rosbaud and Gielen were by no means a *Moses und Aron* desert. Although one doesn't think of **Georg Solti** as a great champion of the Second Viennese School, he summoned the full Royal Opera forces with a 1965 *Moses und Aron* production directed by Peter Hall, the sound-only recording of which surfaced a few years ago on Opera Depot. Solti is his hyper-alert self and the cast has plenty of

commitment. The surprise, however, is the value of hearing the opera in English. Although the translation upsets the kind of alliteration that Schoenberg intended with his text, the libretto tends to be more informational than poetic, thus communicating the opera's philosophical issues on a more visceral level. Forbes Robinson acts Moses effectively, and what a luxury to have Richard Lewis's lyric tenor and cultivated enunciation as Aron.

Solti was still using an English translation in 1971 when he conducted a concert version of the opera with the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, in which the great Wagnerian Hans Hotter declaims the role of Moses with eloquence and in impressively idiomatic English. A privately made recording survives but isn't published.

The live 1966 **Hermann Scherchen** recording is among the least enjoyable but the most instructive. Conductors consider Schoenberg tougher to penetrate than Berg because of the layered orchestration, so being able to detect all the contrasting elements wasn't likely in the opera's early years – conductors tended to prioritise. A good litmus test is to listen out for the mandolin, which is used intermittently and, in most recordings, is covered by the rest of the orchestra for all but a few seconds. Scherchen's priorities are so severe he seems to be trying to make the piece into a chamber opera. Without the vocal force of a large chorus, the burning bush sounds like music from a 1950s horror movie. In Act 1 scene 2, Josef Greindl's Moses is placed so far into the background that he sounds like somebody who's mumbling intensely. You do hear the mandolin: some textures almost seem like a perverse duet between that instrument and the piccolo. So is it any wonder that Scherchen's bright idea for the unfinished Act 3 has had so little traction? With compromised sound quality (few things in life are more trying than badly recorded Schoenberg), many listeners probably don't make it to the end.

The mid-1970s saw two notable recordings that one wishes could be conflated. Reiner Goldberg is an unusually

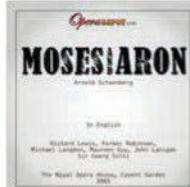
HISTORIC CHOICE

Forbes Robinson *Moses*

Richard Lewis *Aron*

ROH Chorus and Orchestra / Georg Solti

Opera Depot (S) ② OD10881-2



This is the first recording to make the piece speak in all its theatricality (after all, it's live and conducted by Solti), and in surprisingly effective English.

THE LIVE CHOICE

John Tomlinson *Moses* **Philip Langridge**

Aron Met Opera Chorus and Orchestra /

James Levine NY Met Op (B) ② 10044556

The Met takes the opera into the next



generation of performance practice with specificity of expression and a chorus which truly conveys the individual factions within the Israel nation.

THE DVD CHOICE

Dale Duesing *Moses* **Andreas Conrad** *Aron*

Ruhr ChorWerk, Bochum Symphony Orch / Michael Boder

EuroArts (P) DVD 205 8178



Moses und Aron had to wait for computer animation in order to be fully realised scenically, though Willy Decker's staging probes the text as if it's the Torah.



Schoenberg (left) was troubled by Act 3; his wife and daughter meet Hans Rosbaud at the concert performance of the first two acts in Hamburg in 1954

eloquent Aron in the solid 1976 Leipzig recording led by **Herbert Kegel** with a strong sense of exterior drama and imagination. Richard Cassilly is a bit prosaic in the first **Pierre Boulez** outing with the BBC Symphony Orchestra. As in many of his early recordings, Boulez uses clarity of texture to convey an almost blinding fierceness. Reich's baritonal Moses is even more at home in a super-transparent recording that feels Gallic in its keen attention to sonority. And part of that is down to the luxury casting of a young Felicity Palmer, Gillian Knight, Helen Watts and Philip Langridge.

UNHAPPY RETURNS

I'm not the only one who feels that two of the opera's best-known champions didn't do their best work on return visits. **Georg Solti**'s 1984 Chicago recording initially seemed like a godsend. At last we would hear the opera in all its glory – and I suppose that was true at the time. But only in recent years have I realised why I was surprisingly unexcited by it. In a rhetorically weighted performance one hears many impressive walls of sound, but Franz Mazura is a strangely generic Moses. And although the recording features the great Chicago Symphony Orchestra Chorus, it's not an opera chorus and isn't great on characterisation. One very bright spot is Langridge's Aron, which is among the most elegantly sung and linguistically meticulous readings on record.

In **Pierre Boulez**'s return to the opera (20 years or so after his previous recording)

for a live, fully staged performance, there's a lack of killer instinct – particularly evident in Act 2 when the abandoned Israelites fail to project the desperation of a nation that's been stranded in the desert. At times the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra's sound is a barrier to the visceral power – it feels flabby. Of course Boulez projects his authority, but you also wonder if the singers' characterisation seems underdeveloped because they were letting the now-unseen stage director do the work for them. Chris Merritt is the sort of Aron that Krebs might have been with added seasoning in the Rosbaud recording, his lighter voice and vocal agility a result of singing Rossini for more than a decade. But the beginning of the vocal problems heard on his later Naxos

recording is indeed in evidence here. While Merritt is one of the strengths on Boulez's second recording, he's the primary deficit 10 years later in the Stuttgart recording, not helped by conductor **Roland Kluttig**'s conception of the opera as rather dreamlike – Wolfgang Schöne's Moses seems to begin the opera in a trance – as witness the slow, hard-to-sustain tempos.

One could argue that Langridge also lost a bit of vocal ground between Solti and the 1999 live *Moses und Aron* from the Metropolitan Opera under **James Levine**. But an artist of his calibre never stops gaining ground on other fronts. Many wonderful inflections are evident in the later performance. In the final scene, no Aron is more articulately defiant

SELECTED DISCOGRAPHY

DATE / ARTISTS

| | |
|------|--|
| 1954 | Fiedler ^M , Krebs ^A ; North German RO / Rosbaud |
| 1965 | Robinson ^M , Lewis ^A ; ROH Covent Garden / Solti |
| 1966 | Greindl ^M , Melchert ^A ; Städtische Op, Berlin / Scherchen |
| 1973 | Reich ^M , Devos ^A ; Austrian RSO / Gielen |
| 1975 | Reich ^M , Cassilly ^A ; BBC SO / Boulez |
| 1976 | Haselau ^M , Goldberg ^A ; Leipzig RSO / Kegel |
| 1984 | Mazura ^M , Langridge ^A ; Chicago SO / Solti |
| 1996 | Pittman-Jennings ^M , Merritt ^A ; Royal Concertgebouw Orch / Boulez |
| 1999 | Tomlinson ^M , Langridge ^A ; NY Met Op / Levine |
| 2006 | Grundheber ^M , Moser ^A ; Vienna St Op / Gatti |
| 2006 | Schöne ^M , Merritt ^A ; Stuttgart St Orch / Kluttig |
| 2010 | Duesing ^M , Conrad ^A ; Bochum SO / Boder |
| 2014 | Grundheber ^M , Conrad ^A ; SWR SO, Baden-Baden & Freiburg / Cambreling |

RECORD COMPANY (REVIEW DATE)

| | |
|----------|---|
| F | from Columbia K3L-241 (4/58, 8/61, 10/61) |
| Op | Opera Depot (S) (2) OD10881-2 |
| F | STR13615/16; Opera d'Oro (S) (2) OPD1321 |
| F | Brilliant (S) (2) 9083 (1/75 ^R , 4/94 ^R) |
| F | Sony Classical (S) (1) 88765 42957-2 (11/75 ^R , 12/93 ^R) |
| F | Berlin Classics (F) (2) 0011162BC |
| F | Decca (S) (2) 475 8678DOR2 (1/85 ^R) |
| DG | DG (B) (2) 449 174-2GH2 (10/96) |
| NY | NY Met Op (B) (2) 10044556 |
| ArtHaus | ArtHaus (F) DVD 101 259 (8/07) |
| Naxos | Naxos (S) (2) 8 660158/9 (1/07) |
| EuroArts | EuroArts (F) DVD 205 8178 |
| Hänssler | Hänssler Classic (F) (2) SACD93 314 (A/14) |

Key: ^MMoses ^AAron

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than Langridge. No Moses is more pleading, anguished and nuanced than John Tomlinson. Levine has long conducted a wide range of Schoenberg's work, always bringing a sense of lyricism and overall continuity. But in this recording, he has clearly conveyed a profound, intelligent understanding of the music to his Met forces. Here, *Moses und Aron* is definitely a choral opera. No other recording has such colour differentiation among the various subsets of the Israel nation.

Why, then, isn't the Met the top sound-only choice? One answer is because of the arrival of SACD technology. Now, all those layers of orchestration finally had a chance to be heard and, on the Hänssler Classic set from the SWR Symphony Orchestra Baden-Baden and Freiburg, for the most part they are. **Sylvain Cambreling**'s understanding of the piece, the precision of the ensemble and the audibility factor mean that even in the most hectic passages one can hear the music's metre changes. Is that so important? Yes, because this lends yet another layer of characterisation: one feels the operatic ground shifting along with the changing mob mentality of the Israelites. Andreas Conrad isn't the most vocally alluring Aron, but he knows what he's about, and projects the character with a sense of somebody improvising, none too suavely. In the opening moments, Franz Grundheber's Moses begins in a deep state of prayer and goes on to convey fear, awe and profundity. Few have portrayed this character with such emotional range. Cambreling doesn't go to the grotesque extremes of many conductors, instead giving a sense of overall progression to the Act 2 degradation, ending on a less-than-penetrating whimper of an F sharp.

ONLINE AND ON DVD

The seldom-seen, self-consciously arty 1975 Jean-Marie Straub and Danièle Huillet film version (sometimes called *Moses and Aaron*) made the film festival rounds using the Gielen recording as a soundtrack (a speeded-up version, according to some reports) and has achieved a degree of credibility in some circles. For me, though, there's a fine line between minimalism and amateurism, and this film crosses over into the latter. Sadly, this was the opera's only visual representation until recent years. Now, a YouTube tour of *Moses und Aron* covers the heights and depths of visual overload. Excerpts from Achim Freyer's 2011 Zurich Opera production show Moses looking like Charlton Heston with a Cirque de Soleil makeover. The 2015 Komische Oper Berlin production suggests the title characters are



A recording session for the top choice: Cambreling conducts the SWR SO Baden-Baden & Freiburg

a pair of song-and-dance men. The one that I hope will be released on home video is the Romeo Castellucci production shared by Paris and Madrid, which I've never managed to catch live. I'm a huge admirer of Castellucci, who calls Moses 'the only man who ever met God' – an excellent starting point for this opera. Photos and video excerpts I've seen show meticulously composed stage pictures, including a single, dead woman lying in front of road-worn Brahman bull whose gold lustre has definitely dulled.

As for those productions already out on DVD, the excellent 2006 Vienna State Opera production by Reto Nickler makes the inevitable allusions to the Jewish plight in the Second World War, but without any heavy-handedness. The Israelites are refugees in grey overcoats with small single suitcases, but no swastikas are seen. Act 2 has everybody slipping into evening clothes and acquiring golden pistols for both murder and suicide. **Daniele Gatti** is typically authoritative, and Thomas Moser is an oddly businesslike Aron – as if his character is a *tabula rasa* sounding board from the real world. As Grundheber's leonine Moses rages at him in the final scene, Aron's reaction seems to be, 'You win some, you lose some brother.'

Well, that's one approach. The Ruhrtriennale DVD aims higher, even though Moses and Aron are in plain modern dress as if to underscore that they're everyday people chosen by God. Between the myriad visual elements – the moving platforms in the vast warehouse performing space, the overhead camerawork

and the computer animation on multiple scrims – you're not always sure what is happening where. But being overwhelmed and dazzled by an opera that's full of nightmarish miracles is good. The Act 2 orgies probably come closer to Schoenberg's stage directions than those in any other production – blood-soaked virgins and all. Symbolism still abounds: the calf isn't golden but white on which the Israelites scrawl all sorts of things, reducing their god to their own degraded level.

Most significant is the fact that director Willy Decker has clearly studied the text closely. Conductor **Michael Boder** miraculously holds the performance together over the vast and changeable performance space. With his chiselled features, Dale Duesing's Moses has physical as well as vocal charisma, while Conrad delivers surely one of the best-sung Arons ever.

When it comes to stage interpretation, then, after many years in the desert *Moses und Aron* seems to have found some sort of promised land. Ⓛ

TOP CHOICE

**Franz Grundheber Moses Andreas Conrad
Aron EuropaChorAkademie, SWR SO
Baden-Baden & Freiburg / Sylvain Cambreling
Hänssler Classic** (F) ② SACD93 314



The sound is superb, the conductor knows the opera right down to the floor plan and Moses has an emotional range well beyond certainty and rage.

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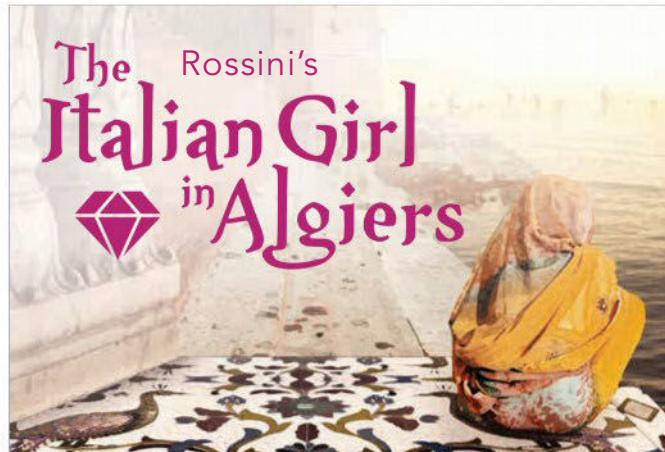
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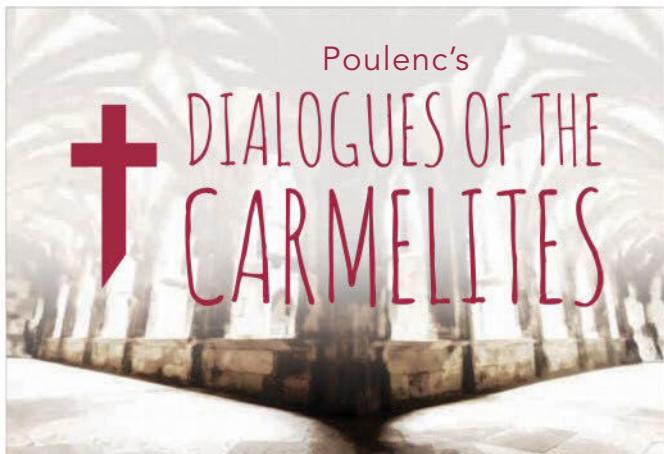
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PLAYLISTS

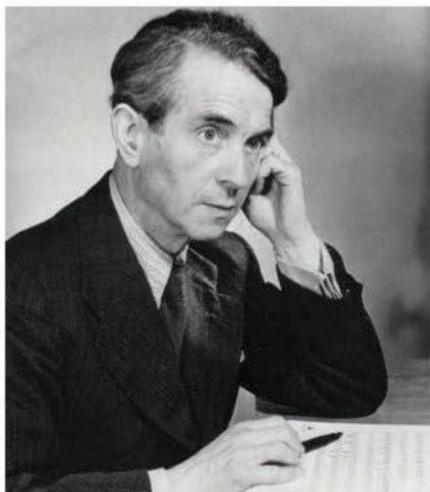
Celebrating English church music; weaving a path through centuries of minimalism

British church music

David Threasher and Geraint Lewis explore some of the finest Anglican music of the 20th century

With his haunting 'carol-anthem' in 1918 Herbert Howells changed the sound of English church music at a stroke by introducing sensuous chromatic harmony and sinewy flowing counterpoint often combined to ecstatic effect. His friend Patrick Hadley sent him a card every Christmas quoting the end of *A Spotless Rose*: 'Oh Herbert, that cadence!' Hadley's own output was tiny but fastidious and his setting, for a friend's wedding, of words from the Song of Solomon opens to overwhelming effect before subsiding in rapture. Michael Tippett was a pioneering conductor of Purcell in the 1940s and was amused when an eager American chorister asked him 'But tell me, what is a Spake?' Of his *Plebs angelica* he once said that only in England could a conscientious objector newly released from Wormwood Scrubs be commissioned to write a work for Canterbury Cathedral.

Presiding over this period was Ralph Vaughan Williams, whose editing of the *English Hymnal* in 1906 was groundbreaking. As Grand Old Man in 1953 he contributed to the Queen's Coronation not only the famous ceremonial setting of the 'Old 100th' but also an exquisitely simple communion motet, *O taste and see*. In 1961 the Duke of Edinburgh commissioned Benjamin Britten to add a *Jubilate* to his *Te Deum* in C of 1936 for the service of Mattins in St George's Chapel, Windsor Castle. And it was there that William Harris served from 1933 to 1961, having written his ravishing Spenser setting *Faire is the heaven* as organist of New College, Oxford, in 1325. Also enjoying an Oxford pedigree was William Walton, who, despite spending his childhood as a Christ Church chorister went down without a degree! The delicious carol *King Herod* was one of his last pieces, composed in 1978. Having commemorated Walton with his *Missa Aedis Christi* in 1984, William Mathias honoured the Queen Mother in 1987 as Patron of the Friends of St Paul's: *As truly as God is our Father so is he also our Mother*. For the late John Tavener the Mother of



Herbert Howells: reinventing English church music

God was a constant source of devotion and inspiration. His fellow schoolboy at Highgate, John Rutter, wrote one of his finest carols for the 1984 Advent Service at St John's College, Cambridge, where both his sons were choristers.

- **Howells** *A Spotless Rose* St John's College Choir / Andrew Nethsingha Chandos
- **Hadley** *My Beloved Spake* Jesus College Choir / Mark Williams Signum
- **Harris** *Faire is the heaven* Merton College Choir / Benjamin Nicholas Delphian
- **Vaughan Williams** *O taste and see* Winchester Cathedral Choir / David Hill Argo
- **Britten** *Jubilate Deo* St John's College Choir / George Guest Decca
- **Tippett** *Plebs angelica* Finzi Singers Chandos
- **Walton** *King Herod and the Cock* Bach Choir / David Willcocks Chandos
- **Mathias** *As Truly as God is our Father* Christ Church Cathedral Choir / Stephen Darlington Nimbus
- **Tavener** *A Hymn to the Mother of God* The Sixteen / Harry Christophers Coro
- **Rutter** *There is a flower* St John's College Choir / Christopher Robinson Nimbus

Let's get minimal!

Jed Distler traces the path of minimalism, from Purcell to Reich

Minimalism in music extends far beyond, well, 'minimalism'. In fact, minimal and repetitious elements in music have been with us for centuries, long before they became an 'ism'. Think of Purcell's

haunting *Fantasy Upon One Note*; the rumbling E flat chord that opens Wagner's *Ring*; the static whole-tone harmony seemingly going nowhere in Debussy's 'Voiles'; the 'one note' and 'one chord' sections of Carter's *Eight Etudes and a Fantasy*; the obsessive left-hand ostinato in Chopin's *Berceuse*; the tolling B flats in Ravel's 'Le gibet'.

A terse little piece like Satie's *Vexations* may not be minimal but it recedes into minimalism when played 840 times in a row, as the composer suggests. By contrast, half an hour is all you need for John Tavener's *Pratirupa* to reiterate its three basic components again and again. Stockhausen's *Stimmung* for six amplified voices systemically parses one chord and its overtones for about 75 minutes. Should you want minimal notes and maximal length but more dissonance, try Morton Feldman's five-plus hour String Quartet No 2. And for a work that transcends its classic minimalist reputation, a happy 40th-birthday year to Steve Reich's joyously flowing, cannily crafted and spiritually generous *Music for 18 Musicians*.

- **Purcell** *Fantasia Upon One Note* Hespèrion XX / Jordi Savall Alia Vox
- **Wagner** *Das Rheingold* - Prelude VPO / Georg Solti Decca
- **Debussy** *Préludes, Book 1* - *Voiles* Sviatoslav Richter pf DG
- **Carter** *Eight Etudes and a Fantasy* - No 3, *Adagio possibile*; No 7, *Intensely* Quintetto Arnold Stradivarius
- **Ravel** *Gaspard de la nuit* - *Le gibet* Abbey Simon pf Vox
- **Satie** *Vexations* Stéphane Ginsburgh pf Sub Rosa
- **Tavener** *Pratirupa* (version for piano and string orchestra) Ralph van Raat pf Netherlands Radio Chamber Philharmonic / JoAnn Falletta Naxos
- **Stockhausen** *Stimmung* Theatre of Voices / Paul Hillier Harmonia Mundi
- **Feldman** *String Quartet No 2* Ives Ensemble HatArt
- **Reich** *Music for 18 Musicians* Steve Reich & Musicians ECM New Series



The playlists for this feature were compiled in conjunction with Qobuz, the music streaming service. You can listen at gramophone.co.uk/playlists

PERFORMANCES & EVENTS

Live music-making and reviews of online concerts, including Mozart's *Lucio Silla* from Paris, Antonio Pappano at the Edinburgh Festival and Marin Alsop conducting an Adams premiere

Granada Theatre, Santa Barbara, CA & online

Alan Gilbert conducts Beethoven's *Eroica*, July 16

Santa Barbara's eminent Music Academy of the West festival (June 13 – August 6) is currently enjoying a four-year partnership with the New York Philharmonic, which includes Music Director Alan Gilbert appearing annually to conduct the Academy Festival Orchestra and to teach. This performance, which will be live-streamed on the festival website and then uploaded to YouTube, begins with 'The Representation of Chaos' from Haydn's *The Creation*, followed by Berg's Three Pieces for Orchestra and Beethoven's Symphony No 3, *Eroica*.

musicacademy.org

Salle des Combins, Verbier; and online & Radio Espace 2

Kyung Wha Chung at the Verbier Festival, July 22 & 24

The opening concert of this year's Verbier Festival (July 22 – August 7) finds Kyung Wha Chung collaborating once again with Charles Dutoit, with whom she made many of her classic Decca recordings, to perform Brahms's Violin Concerto with the Festival Orchestra. Also featuring Berlioz's *Symphonie fantastique*, the concert will be streamed on Medici and broadcast live on Espace 2. Medici will also stream Chung's recital on July 24 with sonata partner Kevin Kenner.

medici.tv; rts.ch/espace-2/programmes/

Milton Abbey, Dorset & online

VOCES8 at Milton Abbey music festival, July 25

Hosted by vocal group VOCES8, the Milton Abbey International Festival (July 25-30) presents a week of performances in Dorset's beautiful 12th-century abbey, running in tandem with a music summer school. The opening-night concert, featuring VOCES8, includes everything from Bach's Cantata No 150 to the group's lighter jazz and pop repertoire. If you can't get to Dorset, a recording of the concert will be available on the VOCES8 website from July 26.

miltonabbeyfestival.com; voces8.com

Museum Prinsenhof, Delft & NPO Radio 4

Classic and contemporary chamber music at Delft Chamber Music Festival, July 28 & August 7

The Delft Chamber Music Festival (July 28 – August 7) celebrates its 20th anniversary this

ONLINE OPERA REVIEW

Laurence Equilbey conducts an early Mozart opera in Paris's Philharmonie



Mozart

'Suits for singers,' is how Roger Norrington once summed up the early operas of Mozart. None is looser fitting, yet more stylishly tailored in the details, than *Lucio Silla*. Written for Milan in 1772, and rewritten for the singers on hand, this *opera seria* tale of Roman-imperial wrangling seems to benefit from the cuts taken by Nikolaus Harnoncourt and largely adhered to in this concert-staged performance by his pupil Laurence Equilbey. A scintillating if not swiftly paced two-and-a half-hours ensues. Equilbey brings a choral trainer's zeal for accents on the button to her period-instrument orchestra and restlessly inventive harpsichord continuo. Filming is simple and effective; subtitles are provided in French.

As the eponymous dictator of the piece, Alessandro Liberatore lives up to his name with a full-bodied, agile tenor. Indeed, all

the singers have turned up the dial to 11 and the close miking doesn't always cope. Bold casting allots Silla's enemy Cecilio to Franco Fagioli (pictured), surely the outstanding male soprano of our day. On this showing his ranges have knitted together better than in his Idamante for the Royal Opera's *Idomeneo* of 2015.

Some subtleties of subversive characterisation in Rita Cosentino's modern-dress production are teased out by their two stooges, Cinna (Chiara Skerath) and Celia (Ilse Eerens). The star of the show, however, is the Mariinsky-trained Olga Pudova, seven months pregnant at the time, as Giunia, loved by Cecilio, desired by the emperor. With fearless coloratura and a serenely possessed stage presence, she has it all.

Peter Quantrill

Available to view for free until October 23, 2016 at live.philharmoniedeparis.fr

year through the theme, 'DNA: in search of essence'. A number of the events will be broadcast by the Netherlands' public service radio channel NPO Radio 4, including the opening and closing concerts which present music matching the festival's own DNA (the best of old and new). So, the July 28 programme includes Caplet's Septet for three female voices and strings, plus the world premiere of a new string octet by

Mathilde Wantenaar, while the closing concert (August 7) follows Schubert's Octet with the beautiful Octet by Jörg Widmann.

delftmusicfestival.nl/en

Santa Cruz Civic Auditorium & KALW 91.7 Radio

Marin Alsop conducts a John Adams premiere at Cabrillo, August 6

This season is Marin Alsop's last as the

Cabrillo Festival's Music Director after 25 years in the role, and she's going out with a bang. All the concerts in this contemporary music festival will be broadcast on KALW 91.7 Radio. This one, on August 6 and conducted by Alsop, opens with the world premiere of John Adams's festival commission, *Lola Montez Does the Spider Dance*, dedicated to Alsop herself. The programme also includes Adams's *Absolute Jest*, performed by the Attacca Quartet, as well as the world premiere of another commission, *Spinning Music* by Michael Kropf. cabrillomusic.org; kalw.org

Usher Hall, Edinburgh & BBC Radio 3

Italian gems and a Boulez celebration at the Edinburgh International Festival, August 6 & 12

The Orchestra dell'Accademia Nazionale di Santa Cecilia conducted by Antonio Pappano opens the EIF this year. Joined by the Edinburgh Festival Chorus for the first of two concerts, the programme comprises Italian operatic and choral treasures including Rossini's *Stabat mater*. Another highlight is the August 12 Boulez celebration with the BBC Scottish SO conducted by Matthias Pintscher, featuring works including 'Don' from Boulez's *Pli selon pli* and *Mémoriale* (...explosante-fixe...Originel). It will be recorded for later broadcast on BBC Radio 3. It's also

worth noting that all the festival's morning concerts taking place at Queens Hall will be broadcast - either live or after the event - on Radio 3.

eif.co.uk; bbc.co.uk/radio3

Venetian Theater, Caramoor & WQXR

Pablo Heras-Casado conducts the Caramoor Summer Music Festival's finale, August 7

The Caramoor Summer Music Festival (June 18 - August 7) takes place annually at a country-house estate in Katonah, Westchester, an hour's drive from Manhattan. Its season finale sees the Orchestra of St Luke's and its Principal Conductor Heras-Casado perform Brahms's Symphony No 2, paired with his Violin Concerto; Gil Shaham is the soloist. It will be broadcast live on WQXR 105.9 FM, and audiences worldwide can also access it online via the station's website.

caramoor.org; wqxr.org

Royal Albert Hall, London & BBC Radio 3

Kirill Gerstein performs the original version of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1, August 7

We've been deliberately sparing on the Proms front this issue on the assumption that you'd rather we highlighted some less-obvious options. Still, this particular Prom does sound fascinating, with Kirill Gerstein performing the

original 1879 version of Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1; it's a very different musical beast to the standard version (the latter actually dates from after Tchaikovsky's death), being far less bombastic right from the opening piano chords. (Gerstein discussed this version in the February 2015 issue's Musician and the Score.) Thomas Dausgaard conducts the BBC Scottish Symphony Orchestra in a programme that also features Stravinsky's *The Rite of Spring*.

bbc.co.uk/proms

Glyndebourne & UK cinemas

Béatrice et Bénédict,

August 9

If you only make it to one Glyndebourne cinema showing this summer, don't miss Laurent Pelly's new production of Berlioz's *Béatrice et Bénédict*, an opera gracing the Glyndebourne stage for the first time. Stéphanie d'Oustrac sings Béatrice, with Paul Appleby as Bénédict, and there's also the opportunity to hear conductor Antonello Manacorda conduct on English soil (replacing Robin Ticciati). Principal Conductor of the Kammerakademie Potsdam and Het Gelders Orkest, Manacorda is becoming increasingly prominent as an opera conductor, enjoying a close relationship with La Fenice where he just conducted a new Mozart/Da Ponte cycle.

glyndebourne.com

ONLINE CONCERT REVIEW

A powerful film about the Berlin Philharmonic's strings playing instruments that belonged to Holocaust victims

'Violins of Hope'

As well as containing a vast amount of concert footage, the Berlin Phil's Digital Concert Hall has a substantial archive of documentaries. There are films focusing on the orchestra's music directors from Furtwängler onwards, some fascinating glimpses of the orchestra at work and play, and a handful of shorts. One of these is called 'Violins of Hope'.

This film, made by Katrin Sandmann, starts with the former leader of the BPO, Guy Braunstein, visiting the Tel Aviv shop of the violin-maker Amnon Weinstein. Braunstein told his wife he'd be 20 minutes: seven-and-a-half hours later he emerged and a plan had been born. Weinstein had been systematically collecting and restoring violins that had belonged to victims of the Holocaust. Many of those musicians perished but a number survived (such as cellist Anita Lasker-Wallfisch, who settled in London, and who talks with great eloquence about her appalling experiences in Auschwitz and Bergen-Belsen alongside her sister Renate). For Jews, these often German-made violins were irredeemably



tarnished, and not to be played. But, as a violin-maker, Weinstein realised that an instrument needs to sing, and that when it sings, the memory of its former player lives again. Braunstein suggested gathering these instruments together for a concert, and the 'Violins of Hope' became a reality. He himself chose a violin that had belonged to someone who was in Auschwitz.

Braunstein returned to his former orchestra, and his colleagues chose their instruments from Weinstein's collection,

each player keen to learn the instrument's history, and together with Simon Rattle they gave a concert. Listening to the *Adagietto* from Mahler's Fifth Symphony is a powerful experience, and concludes an extraordinary film. (The entire and very moving 'Violins of Hope' concert is also available in the DCH.)

James Jolly

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ALEXANDER ZEMTSOV – viola
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COLIN PARIS – contrabbasso
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THIS MONTH a multiformat pocket music player, Neat's very cute Iota Alpha floorstanding speakers, and how sustainable is audio's ultra-high end?

Andrew Everard Audio Editor

AUGUST TEST DISCS



Another glorious set from the Trondheim Soloists, beautifully recorded in hi-res by the 2L label, including Vaughan Williams's *Tallis Fantasia*



Gibert & Sullivan - live! This Linn release captures *HMS Pinafore* in concert, with a wonderfully exuberant sense of performance

From classic turntables to celebratory speakers

Pro-Ject celebrates a quarter of a century in style, and Bowers & Wilkins completes its new 800 Series



There's no sign of any let-up in the momentum of the vinyl revival, and one of the companies responsible for kick-starting the new interest in LPs – Vienna-based Pro-Ject – is celebrating. To mark its 25th anniversary, it has launched a new model, the £799 Classic ①, which the company says 'takes the vintage aesthetic of those iconic turntables from the 1950s, '60s and '70s but adds modern technology to deliver an exciting sound in an attractive package'. Available in three finishes, the Classic has already drawn comparisons with the styling of Linn's celebrated LP12 turntable, but is of an all-Pro-Ject design, combining an internal chassis with Thermo Plastic Elastomer damping, on which the motor is mounted, and a second floating chassis carrying the platter bearing and the tone arm, which are thus decoupled from the motor. The belt drives a sub-platter, on which sits the aluminium alloy main platter, and the new Classic Tonearm uses an aluminium tube wrapped in carbon fibre for extra stiffness.

Also new on the turntable front is the TT5 tangential tone arm from German manufacturer Clearaudio ②, which sells for £1750. Like all Clearaudio products it's handmade, and is designed as a more affordable version of the company's TT2 and TT3 models, created by removing some of the features of those pricier designs. The

arm uses a carriage running on precise rollers along a polished glass rail, and achieves the same parallel tracking used when records are cut, thus tracing the groove with minimal distortion. The TT5 is available in a choice of silver or black.

New from PMC is a complete line-up of speakers, the twenty5 ③, to mark the British company's own quarter-century. Designed to sit above the existing twenty range, the speakers feature an innovative take on the company's proprietary Advanced Transmission Line bass-loading, using a new vent design called Laminair. Developed by PMC's head of design, Oliver Thomas, it draws on his experience with the Red Bull Formula 1 team, where he was previously employed. The speakers also use newly designed mid/bass drivers with fine-weave glass fibre cones and a motor system said to be 80 per cent more powerful than that in the twenty series drivers, while the company's Sonolex fabric dome tweeter has also been refined. The five-strong twenty5 range starts with the compact twenty5.21 standmount model at £1870 per pair and goes up to the twenty5.26 – perhaps calling the top model twenty5.25 was too confusing! – at £6995/pr. All models are available in book-matched oak, walnut and amarone veneers, and also in diamond black.

Also celebrating this year is Bowers & Wilkins, which has reached its half-

century. Although the big news of late has been about the British company's takeover by a relatively unknown Silicon Valley company (see last month's Audio Essay), it has also completed its 800 Series Diamond range, launched last autumn, with the arrival of the flagship 800 D3 loudspeaker ④. Selling for £22,500 per pair, the new model traces its lineage all the way back to the 801 of 1979; but, despite only being marginally taller than the previously announced 802 D3 (£16,500/pr), the new model actually uses a unique carbon-fibre construction for its twin 25cm Aerofoil bass drivers, enhanced crossovers and a much larger bass enclosure. A solid aluminium plinth using constrained damping techniques replaces the alloy design on the less expensive models, thus lowering the centre of gravity of the speaker and improving stability.

Finally, some novel earphones from SoundMAGIC, building on the success of its very affordable E10, which has been on sale for six years. The new E10C ⑤, at £40, adds a 'universal' three-button remote in its cable, allowing the listener to adjust volume, skip tracks, start and stop their music and answer phone calls, whether they're using Apple iOS or Android devices. Sitting above the E10C are two enhanced models with the same adaptive remote capability: the E50C sells for £50, while the range-topping E80C is £70. ⑥

● REVIEW PRODUCT OF THE MONTH

Pioneer XDP-100R

The latest entrant in the fast-growing personal audio market: can Pioneer's extra features give it the edge?

Personal audio is big news right now. The boom in headphone sales is well-documented – initially driven by the popularity of smartphones able to play music, but going on to evolve into the whole 'head-fi' sector – and of late we've also seen the growth of the dedicated portable music player, offering an alternative to the all-in-one phone/computer/camera/player devices.

Pioneer is a case in point. With its home audio division sold to Onkyo last year, it has now introduced its own DAP, or digital audio player, the £500 XDP-100R, and it's not hard to see the parent company's influences at play in the new unit, not least of which is access to the Onkyo Music download store, prominently displayed in the top left of the home-screen when you fire it up.

Yes, the new Pioneer is definitely using its connections, and in more ways than one. Being based around the Google Android operating system, this is both a dedicated player and a full-fledged 'smart' device, complete with Bluetooth and Wi-Fi connectivity. That means, provided you are somewhere with an internet connection, you can log straight into an account with the Onkyo store and download music directly to it, or indeed connect to Deezer, Spotify or Tidal and stream music via the Pioneer.

And that last-mentioned streaming service opens up another aspect of the Pioneer's offering: it has built-in decoding for MQA, the much-vaunted 'audio origami' packing method developed in the UK by Meridian, which delivers hi-res

PIONEER XDP-100R

Type Hi-res digital audio player

Price £500

File formats PCM to 384kHz, DSD64/128/246

Storage capacity 32GB internal, expandable via dual micro SD card slots

Outputs 3.5mm stereo headphone socket, configurable as fixed line-out

Connectivity Micro USB, Wi-Fi, Bluetooth with aptX

Features Switchable upsampling, Deezer/Spotify/Tidal integration

Accessories supplied USB cable, protective bumpers, manual (printed and on-screen)

Dimensions (HxWxD) 12.9x7.6x1.3cm, 14.6x7.6x14cm with bumpers fitted

Weight 198g, bumpers add 5g
pioneer-audiovisual.eu



The Pioneer may look quite chunky, but it's still compact enough to slip in a pocket and weighs a solid-feeling but not too weighty 200g

audio in a much less bandwidth-hungry form, not to mention storing it in much less space. It's a format that has been slow to bloom, despite being promoted as the future of audio for what seems like a very long time, but Tidal, Onkyo and Pioneer have long been cited as supporting it and the recent announcement that Warner Music has got on board may just deliver the tipping-point the technology needs.

The Pioneer may look quite chunky, at least when compared to the slimmest of today's smartphones, but it's still compact enough to slip in a pocket at just 13mm thick, just under 13cm tall and 7.6cm wide, and weighing a solid-feeling but not too weighty 200g or so. It comes in silver or black, has high-quality metal casework surrounding its 4.7in high-resolution touchscreen, and is supplied with optional 'bumpers' to protect the connections on the top (headphone/line out) and bottom (USB).

A 1630mAh rechargeable battery is fitted, said to be good for 16 hours' use – though this is somewhat dependent on the music format being played, and thus the processor load – and has 32GB of internal

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SUGGESTED PARTNERS

It's as good on the move as it is in a home system: here are some partnering suggestions...

FOCAL SPHEAR

Focal's first in-ear headphones draw on the company's speaker experience to deliver a detailed, powerful sound ideal for use with the Pioneer



AVI DMS

Reviewed last month, AVI's smaller active model would make an excellent desktop system when fed from the Pioneer's headphone output



storage, with two micro SD cards to allow extra memory to be added.

Digital-to-analogue conversion is provided by the acclaimed ESS Sabre ES9018K2M package found in many a high-quality player and DAC these days, and this allows the Pioneer to play music all the way up to 384kHz sampling rates, as well as DSD files – both .dsf and .dff – up to the so-called 'quad-DSD' 128/11.2Mhz variant. The built-in headphone amplifier is also by ESS, in the form of the Sabre 9601K, and delivers a healthy 750mW per channel into a 32 ohm headphone load. The Pioneer can also function as a personal video player and, running Android 5.1.1 'Lollipop' on a Qualcomm quad-core processor, can be customised with a whole range of apps from the Google Play store should you so desire.

Music can be transferred to the XDP-100R using micro SD cards or via the cable supplied: Pioneer has free X-DAP Link software for Windows computers, or you can simply drag and drop, while the free Android File Transfer software for Macs allows similar transfers. There's a built equaliser function for playback, complete with presets and allowing total user customisation, a three-position digital filter selector, adjustments for use when the player is used via an external DAC and the ability to set upsampling, in which all lesser signals are upconverted before being passed through the DAC, to reduce noise: the default is 192kHz. You can also switch off superfluous circuitry to deliver the purest possible sound, turning off the Wi-Fi, Bluetooth and display if you wish.

PERFORMANCE

While not as slim as the Astell & Kern AK Jr I've been using for a while now, the Pioneer is a pretty cute little device, with the same kind of feeling of solidity and quality. You can operate it entirely using the touchscreen, but it also has physical controls for major playback functions on the right side panel and a volume control thumbwheel on the left, plus a 'fixed volume' option for when you're using it as a line source.

I tried it both as a source and as an all-in-one player, the latter with a range of headphones including Bowers & Wilkins

P3s, Oppo PM-1s and my trusty Phonak in-ears, which I recently had turned into custom IEMs courtesy of the nice people at Snugs. In every case the Pioneer delighted with the clarity of its sound and its mix of weight and detail.

Playing the latest Trondheim Soloists set, 'Reflections', I was able to switch between the DSD64 version and the much smaller MQA files, which delivered 352.8kHz/24-bit from a file not much more than 25 per cent the size of the DSD version and sounded every bit as magnificent. It's a typically glorious and atmospheric 2L recording: I was quite swept away by the Vaughan Williams *Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis* over headphones, and then even more so when the Pioneer was connected to my main hi-fi system.

As a proof of concept for MQA, this release is far more convincing than all the various sample tracks I've been able to accumulate to date: the MQA files carry the full DXD resolution of the original recording and yet are not much more than twice the size of a standard CD-quality FLAC download. And the Pioneer makes enjoying the apparent abilities of this new format extremely simple, as well as being a convincing player of everything from iPlayer-quality radio downloads (at 320kbps AAC) to the highest-resolution DSD files.

Having used a number of Android-based devices, the XDP-100R is easy to use. Even a newcomer to such players will find its simplified interface quick to understand, and the prominent 'buttons' for music playback and the Tidal and Spotify integrations are similarly intuitive. Within moments I had London Early Opera's recent 'Handel at Vauxhall' set streaming over Wi-Fi via Tidal, and very fine it sounded, too – even if it had me hankering to hear what a hi-res version could do.

After extended use, including DSD and MQA playback, the quoted battery life seems completely credible, making the Pioneer more than suitable on, for example, a long flight, and completing a very appealing little player that's a fine rival for the established DAP competition. If you want high-quality music on the move, it's worthy of serious consideration. **G**

Or you could try...

The Pioneer may have wide-ranging capabilities but it's entering a fast-growing market in which there's no shortage of rivals

Astell & Kern AK Jr

An obvious challenge comes from Astell & Kern's svelte AK Jr model, which sells for £400 and can play audio up to 192kHz and DSD64. Its format coverage is a little more restricted than the Pioneer but it has a more powerful headphone output and is slimmer, as you can discover at astellnkern.com.



Arcam MusicBoost

If you're determined to use your iPhone 6 or 6S as a music source, you can add on Arcam's £120 MusicBoost, which combines a high-quality DAC, a headphone amplifier and a battery pack in a slip-on sleeve for your smartphone, not only improving the sound but also extending the operating time by up to 120 per cent between charges. Just the thing for long-distance travel – see arcam.co.uk.



Onkyo DP-X1 portable player

The Pioneer also faces competition from close to home, with the arrival of parent company Onkyo's DP-X1 portable player, which has a very similar specification including MQA/384kHz/DSD256 capability, and built-in Wi-Fi and Bluetooth with aptX. It even looks pretty similar but offers a balanced output on a 2.5mm socket, and doubles up on both digital-to-analogue converters and amplifiers. It sells for about the same price as the Pioneer. More information at uk.onkyo.com.



● REVIEW NEAT IOTA ALPHA

Neat Iota Alpha loudspeakers

Compact, stylish and innovative, the second speaker in Neat's Iota range proves a highly attractive performer

Never let it be said that Neat Acoustics lacks innovation. From its massive Ultimatum speakers with their extra upward-firing tweeters to its tiny Iota model, perfect for desktop use and in small rooms, this relatively small British company, based in Castle Barnard, Durham, and run by musicians, always seems to be able to come up with something different.

With its latest arrival, it has answered the question of what it could do to follow the little Iota speakers, with their novel 'landscape' format and 50mm EMIT planar magnetic tweeter. First shown in 'almost finished' form at the Bristol Sound and Vision show back in February, the Iota Alpha was launched at the High End show in Germany, and is now in the shops at £1385 per pair.

Put simply, the Alpha takes the small Iota box, angles it upwards and mounts it atop an enclosure containing a downward-firing bass driver, making it much more suitable for 'main room' use. And though the speaker has gained in stature, it's hardly huge, standing just 45cm tall (or about half as tall as most floorstanding speakers).

Then again, Neat is no stranger to unusual floorstanders: its compact Motive range combines a steep rearward rake with slender cabinet dimensions, and has long been a mainstay of the company's range, while the Momentum and Ultimatum line-ups use extra hidden drivers in isobaric configuration to extend bass response. There's trickery here, too: outwardly the Iota Alpha just looks like the original Iota model atop a pedestal, but in fact there's that hidden 13.4cm bass driver, taking over from the visible 10cm unit to extend the low frequencies down to a claimed 33Hz, as well as giving a useful boost in sensitivity.

It seems Neat's Bob Surgeoner has been pondering ways of developing the Iota idea ever since the first model appeared in 2011 – was it really that long ago? He says that it was important to retain the Iota's qualities while creating a floorstanding version with an appeal to those wanting a bigger sound from small boxes, and that has been achieved by leaving the little two-way speaker more or less as is, in its own sealed enclosure at the top of the new model.

That means the lower section can be dedicated to delivering bass, with airspace

for the downward-firing driver created by the floorspikes supplied with the speakers.

PERFORMANCE

Part of the brief Neat set itself for the Iota Alphas was to make them easy to accommodate in a wide range of rooms, and as inconspicuous in use as the buyer required: the dimensions help significantly in this respect, that 45cm height combining with a width of just 20cm and depth of 16cm. These really are speakers almost able to vanish into the room – depending on your decor and the finish chosen – not least because even from a sitting position on a low seat they will sit below your eye-line. In fact, with the speakers set up in my room, I did start thinking about how well the Alphas would suit a multichannel set-up, with a single speaker placed below a TV or projector screen. Seems I'm not the only one thinking this way: I noted that the label on the slender, wide box in which the speakers were delivered had check-boxes not only for the various finish options, but also to indicate whether the package to which it's affixed contains one speaker or a pair.

The effect is quite uncanny, projecting a sound completely free of the speakers. It's near to a sonic hologram!

As with the original Iotas, the Alphas are 'handed', with one having the tweeter to the left of the midrange driver, the other to the right, so one has the choice of having the treble driver outermost or innermost. With the smaller model, mounted on my desk either side of a computer monitor, I found it advantageous to go 'outer' to create a wider sound stage, but with the Alphas more widely spaced I'd expected to prefer the sound of the speakers set up with 'inboard' tweeters, which I thought would give better image focus. However, after some listening, I reverted to the 'outboard' set-up, which gave the best balance between imaging and sound stage scale.

Thus arranged, these little speakers deliver a quite magical sound, way beyond any preconceptions their modest dimensions may create. Perhaps the most striking thing they do is create the illusion



NEAT IOTA ALPHA

Type Floorstanding speakers

Price £1385/pr

Drive units 50mm EMIT planar magnetic tweeter, 10cm mid/bass driver, 13.4cm downward-firing woofer

Sensitivity 86dB/1W/1m

Impedance 4 ohms

Frequency response 33Hz-22kHz

Finishes American Walnut, Natural Oak, Black Oak and Satin White, with special finishes available to order

Dimensions (HxWxD) 45x20x16cm

neat.co.uk

of the image hanging in the air at ear-level, with never any sense of 'listening down' to the speakers: with solo performances such as the violin lollipops of Leonidas Kavakos on his 'Virtuoso' album for Decca (a June Editor's Choice) the effect is quite uncanny, the Alphas projecting a sound completely free of the speakers. It's dangerously near to a sonic hologram!

What's more, the sound combines excellent definition and atmosphere, thanks to that sweet-sounding planar magnetic tweeter, with plenty of low-end weight, allied to speed and 'clout': playing the excellent Linn recording of Scottish Opera's *HMS Pinafore* there's a wonderful sense of a live performance set before you, while with the Trondheim Soloists' beautiful reading of Vaughan Williams's *Tallis Fantasia* (on 2L), the Neats revel in the extra detail and ambience available in the hi-res DSD files and deliver a wonderful shimmering view of the strings, allied to real orchestral substance.

Combine that sound with the compact, room-friendly design and I think Neat may have another winner on its hands with this innovative speaker. **6**

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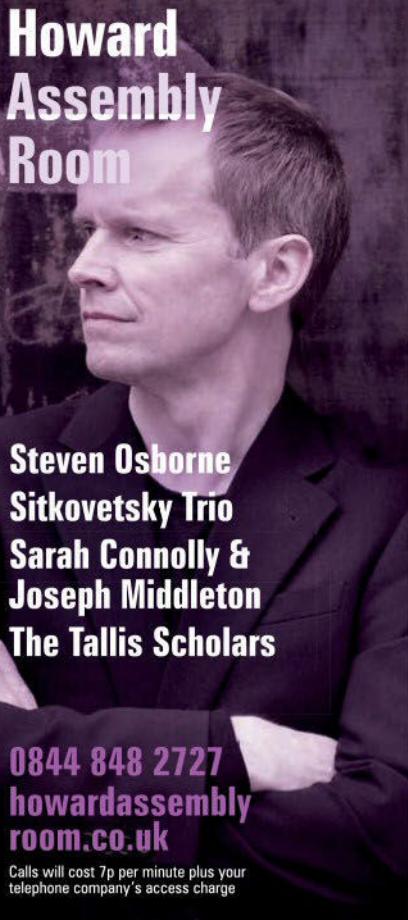
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ESSAY

How high is High, and how will it all End?

The upper echelons of the audio industry seem to be aiming ever higher with their 'statement' products – but just how sustainable is this business model?



The High End show: 'Do you have one bigger, more expensive and perhaps with solid gold rather than plating?'

Yes, it was called High End 2016, but wandering around the annual show in Munich a month or two back, two things struck me: one is that, as the show has grown in size, so the scope of products on show has expanded, and the other is that those companies fitting its original description are aiming ever higher in their search for customers.

The show has been organised by Germany's High End Society for many years now. But of late the show has changed: in the past it was an event of passing interest to the overseas visitor, usually to see the state of the market in Germany; however, in recent years it has become the major global exhibition for specialist audio, overtaking even the massive CES held at the beginning of each year in Las Vegas, despite that event's attempts to boost its hi-fi presence.

Why? Well, CES is very much a trade show, whereas High End manages to combine the twin functions of trade and consumer event: of almost 20,000 visitors over the four days, some 7000 were trade visitors, coming from 69 countries, while the 518 exhibitors spread over more than 28,000m² of floorspace came from 42 countries, with well over half of them from outside Germany. And British interests were much in evidence: after domestic visitors, the European countries best represented were Great Britain, Italy, Switzerland, the Netherlands, Austria and France, while visitors from beyond Europe were predominantly from the USA, Canada and China.

It's not hard to see why: the location of the show is easy in terms of transport links, both national and international, and the venue is excellent, with a mixture of open exhibition floor on which stands

can be built and closed rooms for more sound-oriented demonstrations. That has played a large part in the expansion beyond the original High End brief into a wider spectrum of the audio arena, where you're as likely to see the superb little Astell & Kern portable players, Roberts Radio products or Naim's Mu-so wireless systems as you are heavyweight turntables and speakers.

Not for nothing did I hear several components on display described as 'footballer's systems'

What's more, representing *Gramophone* at the show, I was pleased to discover that not only is the recognition of the magazine still as strong as ever, but manufacturers were keen to meet me and discuss the possibility of products for review in these pages. Over the course of my few days in Munich, I was able to line up reviews for the next few months, not to mention politely declining offers of some very expensive equipment for consideration.

And that preponderance of not just high-end equipment but stratospherically expensive components set me wondering about the sustainability of quite a few of the companies exhibiting at the show. I can see there is a market for super-luxury goods of all kinds – despite tough financial times in many markets around the world – but I worry about those companies seemingly targeting their ranges beyond the fanatical hi-fi enthusiasts and into the realms of the super-rich. True, in some markets there is still an appetite for excess, where a manufacturer can present the most opulent and exotic design it can muster and yet still be asked 'Do you have one bigger,

more expensive and perhaps with solid gold rather than plating?', but while there will always be those with many rooms to fill, how likely are they to buy multiple big-ticket systems in the way that they might fill their garage/stable-block with several Bentleys, Ferraris or Porsches, or their dressing-tables with a selection of handcrafted watches to suit different occasions?

It's also an old money/new money thing: some may be buying that high-end system they always promised themselves, while others – judging from some of the more outrageous designs on show in Munich – will simply be going for maximum glitz, buying a system designed to impress visitors with its looks as much as its performance. Not for nothing did I hear several components on display described as 'footballer's systems'.

Trouble is, footballers aside, I don't see many younger buyers feeding in to the lower end of the hi-fi market to sustain that growth – and I worry that, at the first sign of a downturn, those buying expensive 'designer' audio as a visual statement, with its performance very much as a secondary consideration, will melt away. After all, the latest pair of huge loudspeakers, or an amplifier with valves large enough to light the room and the power consumption of a small town, may have instant bling-appeal but I'm not sure it has long-term investment value beyond the listening pleasure it will (hopefully) deliver to its owner.

It's always fascinating to see the latest excesses of the hi-fi industry, just as many enjoy viewing automotive exotica at motor shows and the like. I just hope some of these manufacturers aren't building their business on the very fragile surface of a bubble. **G**

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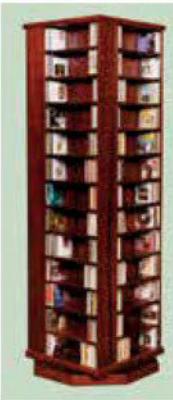


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NOTES & LETTERS

No tears for the LP · Fond memories of the 78 · Recalling Yehudi Menuhin as conductor

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The LP debate continues...

I spent 30 years building a collection of LPs and three years replacing them with CDs. No more clicks, plops, hiss and thuds. Away went unnatural dynamic compression and those distorted *fortissimos* as the side-end approached. Instead, I have been able to enjoy an audio experience closely approaching the original sound, as heard in the perfect concert hall.

Changing to CDs put an end to the bugbear of checking the stylus for wear and correct pressure and to the risk of damaging the LP surface. Instead we gained the convenience of track selection and overall portability.

One of my first CDs was Neville Marriner's *Eroica* on Philips. I remember my sheer astonishment as those opening chords came over in pristine clarity out of total silence: 30 years later, the disc still sounds as good. CDs are especially fine for domestic listening to chamber music, Lieder and solo piano. If I play, say, Paul Lewis's *Diabelli Variations* and close my eyes, he and his piano seem to be with me at home. Similarly, with a string quartet, the instruments are precisely positioned across the end of our sitting room with a clarity of sound that LPs never provided.

*Robert Darlaston
Goostrey, Cheshire*

...because vinyl's just annoying...

Thirty-odd years ago, I resisted conversion to CD. I bitterly resented how adoption of the new configuration instantly cut in half every record store's inventory. A lot of worthy recordings got pushed out because of the sudden need to have both analogue and digital copies of everything in stock. I finally capitulated, won over by the convenience of CDs and by the emancipation from surface noise they heralded. We were all assured that, recordings-wise, digital was the future. Period. I believed this. But now vinyl is coming back? Was this all a big practical joke at the consumers' expense? Vinyl has its passionate devotees, who praise the 'warmth' of analogue, but record hiss, reduced dynamic range and frequent needle-skipping do not constitute warmth to me. They're just irritants, like a pebble in one's shoe or a bit of grit in one's eye.

Letter of the Month

Menuhin could be a wonderful conductor

I was fascinated to read Tully Potter's article on Yehudi Menuhin and his legacy (April, page 10). The writer says that 'orchestral players will tell you that he was no conductor' and I'm sure there is some truth in this – but on occasion he could still achieve wonderful results when the conditions were right and in repertoire he loved.

I have always thought his late Virgin Classics recording of Elgar's First Symphony (12/89) exceptionally good. Reading Humphrey Burton's biography, it is clear that production staff and the members of the RPO playing under him that day remembered the sessions as a musical 'peak experience'. In the words of producer John West, when it came to the slow movement, 'the music



Capable of fine results: Menuhin on the podium

blossomed... it went on and just got better and better'. This caused plenty of anxiety at the time – everyone knew that the maestro had a plane to catch and that they might need to stop at any moment before the magic had been captured on tape!

It was interesting to read about the various outstanding Menuhin recordings mentioned in the article. I am glad that Potter includes the incandescent 1943 performance of the Brahms Concerto, with the Enescu cadenzas, made with the LPO under Boult. I found this by chance in the late 1990s and wish so much that it was better known. In Menuhin's centenary year, it surely cries out for reissue.

*Trevor Ashwin
Reepham, Norwich*

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Please send letters responding to articles in this issue for consideration for publication in the September issue by July 25. *Gramophone* reserves the right to edit all letters for publication.

I'm no more nostalgic for these gremlins than I am for outdoor plumbing or leech therapy.

*David English
Somerville, MA, USA*

...or does it have its uses?

Further to Andrew Boggis's letter about the joy of playing 78s (June, page 124), the 'four-minute medium' can have great advantages when engaging people in novel, dense music.

I myself learned, and have very effectively introduced friends to, the *Ring* cycle by giving them CD copies of the

Coates/Melchior recordings from the late 1920s and early 1930s. Each disc is a 'self-contained' four-and-a-half minutes; each has a descriptive title (ie 'Wotan accepts the fate he has brought on himself' – although that is actually Karl Alwin and Emil Schipper); the performances are generally superb; and the words are clear.

Although the cycle is abbreviated, it contains about a third of the music, and all the 'high points'. It's available on Pristine and Pearl, in transfers by Mark Obert-Thorn.

*Duncan Peppercorn
Sydney, Australia*

OBITUARIES

A much-missed record executive and a trio of distinctive singers

CHARLES RODIER

Lawyer, EMI

Born January 20, 1944

Died June 3, 2016



Charles Rodier joined EMI in 1964 as a member of the Secretariat of the International Classical Repertoire Committee. After leaving to acquire

legal qualifications, he rejoined the company in 1974 as Head of Legal and Business Affairs, overseeing the contractual arrangements of EMI's prestigious roster of classical artists. He safely negotiated the changing contractual arrangements brought about by the arrival of CD and the acquisition of Virgin Classics.

Since in his private life Rodier was a model of courtesy and discretion, a born listener who was also a man of discrimination and unfailing good taste, there can be no surprise that he enjoyed the trust and, on occasion, the deep affection of the artists with whom he dealt. Carlos Kleiber wrote, 'You are the nicest, kindest person in the Music-Business. No. That's wrong. You are the nicest, kindest person full-stop.'

As Colin Davis once observed, 'Whether we are composers, performers, scholars, critics or administrators, we all eat at the same table.' Possessed of a lifelong love of music, and a reverence for those who created or wrote about it, Rodier was too modest a man to account himself part of that company. Yet he most assuredly was.

After leaving EMI, he became an advisor to Testament Records, where he helped facilitate the publication of many great but difficult-to-lease past performances. 'He was trusted,' recalls Testament's founder Stewart Brown, 'and he knew the rules.' In any business, such qualities are gold dust. **Richard Osborne**

PHYLLIS CURTIN

Soprano

Born December 3, 1921

Died June 5, 2016



Curtin created the title-role in Carlisle Floyd's *Susannah* in February 1955. Born in West Virginia, she studied music at the New England Conservatory,

making her debut in 1946 as Tatyana in *Eugene Onegin*. In 1953 she joined New York City Opera with which she sang until 1960, in a variety of roles that included Alice Ford, Violetta, Mélisande, Countess Almaviva and Salomé. After leaving NYCO she sang as a guest and once retired from singing, she taught at Yale and in Boston.

ELSIE MORISON

Soprano

Born August 15, 1924

Died April 5, 2016



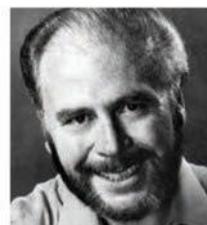
The Australian soprano studied in Melbourne before coming to London to the Royal College of Music. She made her debut in Handel's *Acis and Galatea* in 1948. That same year she joined the Sadler's Wells company, singing Anne Trulove in the British stage premiere of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress* and then at Glyndebourne the following year. Her Covent Garden debut followed in 1953 and until 1962 she appeared as, *inter alia*, Susanna (*Le nozze di Figaro*), Pamina (*Die Zauberflöte*), Marzelline (*Fidelio* – a recording, under Klemperer, is available on Testament) and Blanche (*Dialogues des Carmélites*). On record, she can be heard in *A Child of Our Time*, *Messiah*, Haydn's *The Seasons*, Purcell's *King Arthur*, G&S operettas and Mahler's Fourth (with her husband, Rafael Kubelík, conducting).

ALBERTO REMEDIOS

Tenor

Born February 27, 1935

Died June 11, 2016



A stalwart of the Sadler's Wells and then English National opera companies, Remedios is best known for his performance (and recording, under Goodall) of Siegfried in Wagner's *Ring*. He also sang the role of Mark in the first recording of Tippett's *A Midsummer Marriage*, conducted by Colin Davis, about which *Gramophone* said in May 1971: 'He has a touching quality of voice that here well matches the ardent, impetuous and inexperienced Mark. He handles the early coloratura beautifully.'

NEXT MONTH

SEPTEMBER 2016



Joshua Bell and Steven Isserlis

As the superstar soloists join forces to record Brahms's Double Concerto, Harriet Smith gets to the heart of a rewarding performing partnership

Joining John Wilson in the studio

The British conductor continues his Copland orchestral series on Chandos – and it's not without its challenges, he tells Kate Molleson

Meeting the Seattle Symphony

As the American orchestra concludes its three-disc Dutilleux project, Thomas May profiles an organisation looking to the future

Shostakovich's Symphony No 10

It was an immediate success and has fared well on disc... David Gutman listens to available recordings and names the best

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Beethoven Pf Sons Nos 9, 16, 19, 20 & 26. Hewitt. **CD** CDA68131
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 Ribera Magnificats. Motets. *De Profundis*/Skinner. **CD** CDA68141
 Stojowski Vn Conc Wieniawski Fantaisie brillante. Nizio/
 BBC Scottish SO/Borowicz. **CD** CDA68102

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Rachmaninov Sym No 2 (pp2010). *RCO/Jansons.*
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Barry Humphries

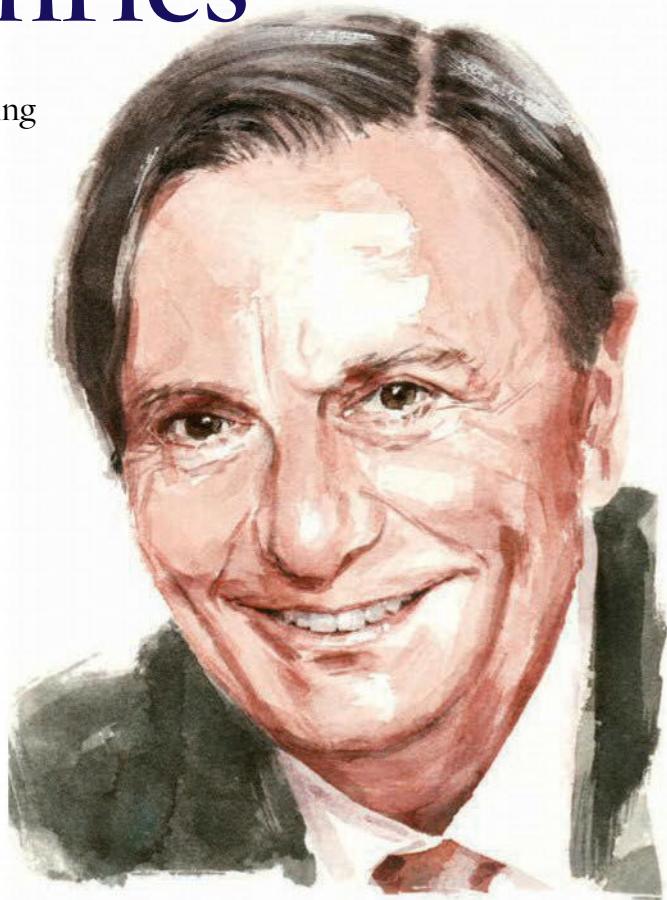
The comedian and actor's journey from discovering classical music in Melbourne to his new show celebrating the music of the Weimar Republic

When I was a schoolboy in Melbourne we had quite a good library and I stumbled upon Constant Lambert's famous book, *Music Ho!*, published in 1934, the year I was born. I was fascinated to read about all these composers I'd never heard of, and Lambert's very idiosyncratic appraisals, or dismissals, and I thought I needed to hear this music. We'd started at the school what was called a gramophone society – incidentally I still call my CD player a gramophone – and we used, at lunchtime on Tuesdays, to play records. The society met in the physics laboratory where there was a turntable and decent speaker. I remember particularly listening to Copland's *El Salón México*, which I don't like much now, but I remember the orchestral colouring appealed to me. And then there was Respighi, a composer who I still like, something like the *Fountains of Rome*. But I was very interested in the composers that Lambert referred to. He admired Darius Milhaud for example, and Kurt Weill. He wrote about the influence of jazz on classical music, which of course infected his own work, particularly the *Rio Grande* and the *Piano Concerto*.

I would write off to a shop in Monmouth Street, London, called Collectors Corner. I requested *The Threepenny Opera*, of which there was an HMV recording of highlights made about 1931, Milhaud's *La Création du monde* and *L'Histoire du soldat* by Stravinsky. And back they came, many months later, beautiful packed in mini wooden crates, and I played them lovingly with fibre needles. Some friends and I used to listen to music at home and we had little, rather pretentious, soirées. You can imagine these schoolboys in a suburb of Melbourne in 1950 listening to this extraordinary music. We would listen to the Beecham recordings of Delius – there would be the sounds of Delius wafting out on the Melbourne night air.

Before I went into the theatre I had a job which lasted a whole year in the Melbourne offices of EMI. It was at the time of the transition from 78s to LPs, and for copyright reasons all 78s had to be broken. Don't ask me why. So my job was to break records with a hammer every day. It was terrible. Whole sets of Arnold Bax, I remember that. It was a totally Dadaist task.

Going to concerts was a social habit in Europe, but in the colonies, you know, not so. But we did have the advantage – a tragic one really – of hosting so many refugees, and many of them were musicians, and they really did bring to that funny, philistine world of Australia in that decade of the 1940s and late 1930s something that we would never have had otherwise. They became teachers, and composers and performers.



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Capriccio

This strange music, which isn't music hall, vaudeville or operetta, captivated me. And I still love it.

In a second-hand bookshop I came across a pile of sheet music which had been brought to Australia by one of the many German and Austrian Jewish refugees. It was totally unfamiliar music, except there was the name again of Kurt Weill, which I remembered from Lambert and my own record. So I bought up all this music for practically nothing. Then recently, when I had an association with the Australian Chamber Orchestra, I suggested an evening of this submerged, overlooked repertoire. To call our show Weimar Cabaret is really incorrect. There are cabaret elements which a cabaret performer, a wonderful girl called Meow Meow, sings, and couple of these things we do together. But there's also a lot of orchestral music – we open for example with Hindemith, not a composer Constant Lambert liked very much. And then we've got a lot of very unfamiliar music, often very jazzy. It's music just before the cataclysm, it's music just before Hitler, before really Western civilization came to an end. And so it has a great poignancy as well as humour and beauty. **6**

Weimar Cabaret is at London's Cadogan Hall on July 29 & 30, August 2 & 3; Edinburgh International Festival on August 6, 8 & 9

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